

**WILLITS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
WORSHIP GUIDE
April 28, 2024**

**Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like
wrapping a present and not giving it.**

William Arthur Ward

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

Bringing in the Light

Halle, Halle, Hallelujah

Frankie J

CENTERING WORDS: Leader

Connected to Christ through the power of love, we become the presence of God for the world.

CALL TO WORSHIP: L is the leader **P is the people**

(L) As members of Christ's tree of life,

(P) we are connected, in love, to God.

(L) As members of Christ's tree of life,

(P) we are connected, in love, to one another.

(L) As members of Christ's tree of life,

(P) we strengthen our connection through worship.

MONEY FOR MISSIONS:

Prayer of thanksgiving

HYMN:

Shine Jesus Shine

#2173 (v. 1, 2)

OPENING PRAYER – Let us pray together.

Loving God, send your Spirit among us now. Bind us to you in love this day, that we may worship in unity and friendship. Bind us to you in love this hour, that we may be strengthened to bring abundant love to your world. In love and gratitude, we pray. Amen

HYMN:

Change My Heart, O God

#2152

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6: 25-33

Eric Glassey

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

MESSAGE: Living a Life of Gratitude

Rosemary Landry

Do you remember teaching your children or grandchildren how to say, “thank you”? With little ones, it takes a bit of repetition before they get the hang of it. We encourage it when we tell them, “Can you say thank you?” And then as they get older and they forget to say thank you, we say; “What do you say?” And the little robots that they are, say “thank you”. We try to teach our children and grandchildren how to be polite, to be grateful for the things they receive or when someone does something nice for them. But we want it to be more than an automatic response. Many days we say “thank you” multiple times and it becomes rote.

Research at Harvard shows that “parents need to teach the kids to notice and think about what we are grateful for on a regular basis”. Harvard University has a program called ***Making Caring Common*** to help kids have more gratitude. I think it's great for us big kids too.

- **First, practice looking:** Teach kids to notice who or what they are thankful for.
- **Second, think about why:** Why do they feel grateful for that person or thing or action.
- **Third, share your gratitude:** Together, share what you're thankful for and why. Talk about it with kids.

- **Last, make it a habit:** Get in the habit of doing it every day with your children, or yourself.

Joshua Brown who has a PhD. in brain sciences and is a professor of psychology and Joel Wong, who is an associate professor of psychology at Indiana University took two groups; one wrote gratitude letters, and the second group did not. When they compared the two groups, the group that wrote gratitude letters showed greater activity in the medial prefrontal cortex when they experienced gratitude in the fMRI scanner. Gratitude changes our brains.

Should we be grateful for everything? For whatever happens? There is a philosophical explanation about why evil exists in the world. It says that we can never know how blessed we are until we have suffered. For some that works. For others it suggests that only through our suffering can we turn and know God. For some, when they have a hard time with this concept, it can lead to feeling guilty because they can't see God in the situation. Jesus didn't teach us the idea that God gives us suffering. He really didn't give us anything to believe one way or another. He gave us an example of how to live a life that connects us to each other and to God; a life of compassion, forgiveness, kindness, and gratitude. I think a lot of bad things happen in this world and God doesn't make them happen, so we appreciate our blessings. I do believe that our world is full of difficulties, sadness, violence, grief and more and we see God because God helps us through these times.

Now, the opposite of gratitude is worry. We tell people not to worry. But that's not all that helpful sometimes. It sounds kind of cliché-ish. Much of the time it isn't helpful because humans are biologically programmed to worry. It is part of the way our brains work. It is part of an in-born survival mechanism. Certain negative or distressing emotions signal our body and brain that our well-being may be at risk and signal us to behave in ways that deal with those threats. We don't have the same kinds of worry as our forefathers, but we do worry about the economy, politics, our health, wars and violence – as well as our personal difficulties. There are little things we worry about, but they don't impact our life very much – like being late or what to fix for dinner.

And we worry well – because our society seems to do it a lot. From Psychology Today, ***“In the past, we’ve worried about something, but everything has turned out OK. The result is that our brain pairs the feeling of worry with a positive outcome. The brain becomes convinced that worrying helps us get the result that we want.”***

But that's not healthy – we just keep worrying more – and it will eventually take a toll on our mental and physical health. It's that all-consuming worry that Jesus is talking about in our scriptures. It's those times when we feel God isn't there in the midst of the chaos and pain and inequity and alienation and war and violence that plagues our world. Christ knows our worries. It's during these times that he says, ***“Look! Look around you! You see the birds are fed. You see the beautiful flowers growing all around you. God did that. And if God will do that for the plants and the animals, God will most certainly take care of you, too!”***

How do we move from simply being grateful and saying thank for what we have to a place where gratitude is a way of life? A Catholic Benedictine monk, Brother Stendhal Rast writes about “the anatomy of gratitude”:

“If you are mindful during the day, noticing the smell of flowers or the smile of a stranger or a moment of deep interaction with someone, you can feel your nervous system calm down. If you hang with it for 10-20 seconds, you will actually rewire your neural networks. Anytime during the day, you can have a moment of presence”.

This is more than a simple “feel good” exercise for the day. This helps us have more than a few times where we've been polite. We are actually installing good into our nervous system and we begin to have a grateful life. We are reminded in our reading for this morning from Matthew 6: 25-27 we read:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?”

Jesus is telling his disciples – and us – to stop worrying. That we need to notice what is good and beautiful. Saying “thank you” in the moment is great. But we want to develop a life of gratitude – where gratitude is more than a moment but becomes part of our lives. When we see God in everyone, in all of creation, our gratitude becomes more than just words. We are not simply made by God, but we are made of God. The practice of gratitude is important, because as we practice gratitude, love, compassion, kindness, joy we become more aware of God's grace in our emotions and all area of our lives. We learn to express our gratitude through love. Through his teachings and his life, Jesus taught us that God is love. We are all connected. Each of us is a part of the universe. We show

our gratitude by continuing to learn how to love. Our gratitude becomes acts of love that flow from us to others. As we learn to move from practicing gratitude to living a grateful life, rejoicing instead of worrying becomes who we are.

HYMN: Give Thanks #2036

Please remain seated as we prepare our hearts for prayer

PASTORAL PRAYERS:

Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

OFFERTORY:

DOXOLOGY: Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God all creatures here below. Praise God above ye heavenly host. Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen

Offering Prayer:

Connected in love we share our offering with Christ's church and Christ's world. Bless these gifts with love. May your grace shine through everything we give, everything we say, and everything we do. In loving gratitude, we pray. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Monday	Prayer Team	10 am	Zoom
Wednesday	Book Study	Noon	In person

Pastor Rosemary is off this week.

HYMN: I've Got Peace Like a River #2145

BENEDICTION:

Go into the world this week with hope. Embrace the power of God's love as you face the struggles and joys of each day. Go forth with courage and faith, bringing

God's grace to others as you love and serve our community this week.

SHALOM: Shalom to you now, Shalom my friends. May God's full mercies, bless you my friends. In all your living and through your loving, Christ be your Shalom, Christ be your Shalom.