

County-Wide Chaplaincy

Thanks you!

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November 2020

Gratitude & Grief

This has been a challenging year. I don't think it is a stretch to say most of us have found ourselves faced with the ongoing struggle that is 2020. We have dealt with all sorts of unknowns and have been constantly bombarded with concerning news that brings anxiety, anger, and worry for the future. We have all faced loss of some sort. Loss of jobs, loss of normal rhythms, loss of anticipated events or trips, loss of gathering with friends, loss of celebrating in usual ways, and the list goes on. I'm sure we can each fill in the blank of what we have lost this year.

And now, in the midst of that year of struggle and loss, we are approaching the season of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving has long been one of my favorite holidays. Not only does it combine lots of my favorite things- family and friends, good food, and football- it also is a time of reflection and gratitude. For the past several years, I have hosted Thanksgiving at my house and crammed over 20 people around a long table in my basement, and each year, I find a reading or a prayer that focuses on Thankfulness to share. Last year, I shared "We Thank Thee" by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

WE THANK THEE

By Ralph Waldo Emerson

For flowers that bloom about our feet,
Father, we thank Thee.
For tender grass so fresh, so sweet,
Father, we thank Thee.
For the song of bird and hum of bee,
For all things fair we hear or see,
Father in heaven, we thank Thee.

For blue of stream and blue of sky,
Father, we thank Thee.
For pleasant shade of branches high,
Father, we thank Thee.
For fragrant air and cooling breeze,
For beauty of the blooming trees,
Father in heaven, we thank Thee.

For this new morning with its light,
Father, we thank Thee.
For rest and shelter of the night,
Father, we thank Thee
For health and food, for love and friends,
For everything Thy goodness sends,
Father in heaven, we thank Thee.



Last year, it was easy for me to be thankful- I had just welcomed my long-awaited Baby Girl into the world and I was in a season that was truly joyous and beautiful. My heart was full of hope and life in that moment and sharing that poem around my table of loved ones reflected that.

This year is a bit of a different story for me, as I'm guessing it is for you. Right now, I am trying to figure out what Thanksgiving is even going to look like for us since having over 20 people stuffed in my basement doesn't seem like the best option right now. And then I look forward to Christmas and New Years and the future and wonder how and if we will ever get back to where we were before 2020. It is hard to carry the weight of all this year has been and continues to be, and find thankfulness.

But there is something this year has been teaching me.

Something that difficult years past have also taught me. Gratitude and grief often go together. This world has so much beauty and so much pain and it is often hard to hold both as we walk through life. It is easy to be consumed by one or the other, or only want to experience the joy apart from the pain. But that is not what life is- life is both, and often both exist simultaneously. We have to learn to accept the joy and the pain, the beauty and the sorrow, the love and the loss, and to find the gratitude in the midst of it all. As we do, we will learn that both have value, and have something important to teach us.

I mentioned above how last year, it was easy for me to be thankful as I had just welcomed my baby girl into the world. But that gratitude I experienced then comes with a story. A story of pain and a story of loss. Before I welcomed my baby girl into the world, I had faced years of not knowing if I could even have a baby followed by a surprise pregnancy that ended in miscarriage. It was devastating for me and I struggled through grief, anger and hopelessness for months after. It took a long time for me to see that if I would not have experienced the pain of losing that baby the year before, that I would not have had my baby girl. I had to walk through the pain to experience the joy of becoming a mom to my little girl. And that joy has not erased the pain of that loss. That pain is etched on my heart alongside the joy that is etched there from the moment I saw my baby's face the first time. The gratitude I experience every time I look at my little girl is accompanied by the grief I feel over the loss of my first baby. And that joining of gratitude and grief I have learned is what gives my life perspective and brings depth to my experience.

So as we enter this season of Thanksgiving, I want to encourage you to not be afraid to acknowledge your grief in the midst of finding gratitude.

Allow yourself to cry over the pain and loss you have felt this year.

Be real with yourself about the struggles you have faced and accept them.

Share your story with someone you trust and allow them into your pain. One of the greatest things loss has taught me is the value of friends who will walk with me into the pain- who don't shy away, but will sit with me in it. Which I must mention is exactly what our Chaplains do for the people in our community.

Lastly, as you acknowledge your pain, look for the gratitude. Look for those moments of beauty in the midst of it all. They are there- they just might be a little harder to find this year. But when you do find them, hold onto them, write them down, and say a prayer of Thanksgiving for them.

And if you are a visual like me, here's a really great exercise for finding gratitude that a close friend of mine did. When we acknowledge and accept the areas in our life that brought grief and celebration, we can find gratitude in the midst of them.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you. My hope is we all find the gratitude in this season.



Brigida Diggs

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