

As we come to the fourth week in this sermon series, we'll be talking about the challenge we face when it comes to gratitude. We personally may practice gratitude and truly be grateful persons. We may be fanatical about our gratitude journals and our new habits of gratitude. We strive to be present, participate, and partner with those in our faith community here in hopes to create a truly grateful community. But the truth is, "as soon as we walk out our front door or turn on the news, we are confronted with a world of payback, quid pro quo, corruption, and ungrateful neighbors. Our personal practices and even faith community practices are at odds with the world we live in."<sup>1</sup>

A similar world is described in the scripture for today: a world filled with pain and sorrow. The distress cries echo throughout the world. This is a world where people die before living a full life including babies. This is a world built on the hierarchal pyramid structure in which there is little chance for advancement for the lower classes, and most people were in those classes. The people were laborers or slaves in which others lived in the houses they built and ate the fruit they planted. This is a world filled with oppression and quid pro quo, a world void of gratitude.

But, hear the good news: The Lord also says in this scripture, "I am creating a new heaven and a new earth" (v. 17). The Lord is creating a new world where "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together" (v. 25) instead of a world where the wolf feeds on the lamb. The Lord is creating a new

world where "the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (v.25) instead of a world where the lion is at the top of the food chain. The lion and ox are equal in this world. The Lord is creating a new world where the serpent eats dust instead of us. The serpent represents sin from the Garden of Eden, so sin will no longer consume us. We will be truly free in this new world that God is creating.

People won't hurt each other nor destroy each other. The hierarchal social structure will be destroyed, and we will all gather around the table where everyone is equal. We will form a circle that allows a constant flow of gift and response. Yes! Yes, you say! I want to live in a world like this! How do we live in a world like this? God invites us to be co-creators in this new world. Diana Butler Bass calls it a Pro Bono world.

Pro Bono is the opposite of quid pro quo. Quid pro quo is "something for something." Gifts are given only to receive a gift or favor in return. These gifts are often used by someone who is more powerful or higher on the pyramid structure. DBB: "Pro Bono means "for the good, for free". Something is given with no expectation of return. A Pro Bono world is one where gifts are given for the good of the receiver and where no exchange is implied or expected. This is a world free of threat or oppression. This is a world of grace, where we all gather around the table of thanks. We form a circle of gratitude where we are all seated equally around the table and where we are all fed."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful*, 164.

<sup>2</sup> Diana Butler Bass, [The Cottage #31, November 15, 2019](#)

Now is the time to reclaim gratefulness and work for a Pro Bono world, God's new creation. This new creation is God's gift to all, so we join in the work of building and planting. We all inhabit the homes we build and eat the fruits of our labor. With small acts of kindness and love, we create together a circle of gratitude that flows with constant gift and response. We receive a gift from God, we respond with gratitude. That response is a gift that is passed on, that will create another response of gratitude. We pass on the gifts to keep the gratitude flowing.

If we don't live a grateful life, we stop the flow or cause it to stagnate. If we don't respond with gratitude, we tend to be stuck in past wounds, or we're not content in the present, or we worry about the future. All of these block the flow of gratitude. But, cultivating gratitude helps us clear out these blocks.

Gratitude allows us to rewrite the past. Instead of focusing on all the pain, we are thankful we made it through our trials. We are grateful that God walked with us through the pain. We see the gifts of people and a supportive community that God sent to walk with us.

Gratitude allows us to see beyond the edges. Sometimes when we're in the thick of a troubling situation, we have tunnel vision. Our perspective becomes narrow with limitations surrounding our situation. But, if we cultivate gratitude by continuing our habits and practices of gratitude, we are able to have a wider perspective about why our struggles are happening and what we can learn from them. We are able to see the big picture. We are able to view our

situation as one little blip on our long journey.

Gratitude allows us to see a future. So often, we get bogged down in our current situation that we don't know how to come out of it. The cloud of ick that we talked about last week prevents us from seeing which way to go. But, with gratitude guiding us, we can see that there is a future, and we have hope that what we are experiencing right now will not overcome us. Christ is a gift who helps us overcome this quid pro quo world and gives us a future.

By responding with gratitude for all of God's gifts, especially the gift of Christ, we are joining in the circle that keeps things flowing. We are doing our part in co-creating God's new creation by being thankful for our past, present, and future. We are joining with others to build a "pro bono world, where all are invited to the table to feast. The world will change when we know gratitude for what it is and when it is rightly experienced as both the center and circumference of the circle."<sup>3</sup> God is in the midst of the circle and has created the circle, so that we all can live peaceably in a new world.

Several weeks ago, we talked about having cues to remind us to start habits of gratitude. Cues could be times: when I wake up, before a meal, before I go to bed. Cues can also be visual. This gratitude rock is a visual cue. Every time we see it, it reminds us to be grateful or it reminds us to do our practices of gratitude. When Linda preached several weeks ago, she shared about her own rock that is a visual cue of God's love and care.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 178.

Perhaps when we see this rock, we'll remember where we got it, and that we are part of this loving community. I pray it reminds you that God has called you to work for a grateful community and a pro bono world. This rock is a circle of gratitude. It is a reminder that we are all in this circle of gratitude in which we are working together for a better world, a world that is more in line with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

During the closing song, I invite you to come to the center and take a rock. We will then make a circle around the sanctuary as we sing. This is your visual cue to take home and to use however it will help you stay in the circle of gratitude and to keep gratitude flowing in your life and in the world.