

“Give Me Jesus”  
July 21, 2019  
St. Paul’s UCC Church  
Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-LeCroy

**Ephesians 1:15-23**

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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Someone told me the other day that it’s impossible to be both anxious and grateful at the same time. As someone who definitely has her anxious moments, this idea has really stuck with me. I keep thinking about it. I can’t be anxious and grateful at the same time. I don’t know about you, but I think I’d rather be grateful than anxious. So, to that end, I’d like to reflect a little on something for which I am grateful.

I grateful for you all – for St. Paul’s – and for our continued life and work together. I am grateful that we found each other at all – over eight years ago! – as we seem to be one of those rare “fits.” No small thing, and I continue to be grateful to God each and every day for it!

I am grateful for the very specific community of people you are, the community of St. Paul’s Church. What I mean by that is that your journey as *this* particular people in *this* particular community has been a very interesting one, and not always so easy. You’ve been through a lot. And yet, you keep coming back. Worship services, ball games, concerts, Labor Day Weekend, committee meetings, choir, Sunday School, potlucks – you keep doing it, you keep showing up, you keep “gitin’ ‘er done.” You keep coming back together, as a church, as the *people of God*. Some of you – Bergy used to always say this – some of you tell me that this is because you are stubborn. But I know that it’s more than that. You are resilient.

And as the community of St. Paul’s Church, though you are one body, you are, as the Apostle Paul says, “made up of many individual members.” So I’m also grateful for y’all as *individuals*. I am not going to name all of the individual folks I’m grateful for, because that means I would name every single person sitting here today, plus a lot of others who *aren’t* here. And that would be a lot of people. And we’d be here forever. So I’ll just say now that I love you as individuals. I love your stories (some of you can make me laugh until the tears roll my cheeks). I love listening to your hopes, your dreams. I love visiting you

and your families in the hospital. I love the privilege of walking with you in your joys and in your sorrows. I love who you are, the very particular, delightful, encouraging, hilarious, profound, quirky, thoughtful, generous, *faithful* people God has created you to be.

I am grateful for you, St. Paul's.

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Gratitude. It's a wonderful thing. A holy thing, even. But where, exactly, does it come from? When I am able to feel grateful – which is not all the time – but when I am able to feel grateful, how does that happen? How do I feel it?

Let's see. Maybe I feel grateful sometimes because my circumstances in life are so good. My husband and I are healthy, we have two great kids, we not only *have* jobs but we *love* our jobs, we live in a fantastic state. Maybe I'm able to feel grateful because things are really pretty darn good for me. ...But on second thought, I don't think that's it. I've seen plenty of folks who struggle with their health, who have lost all their loved ones, who have next to nothing, and who are still able to live lives full of gratitude.

Hmm. If it's not because of my circumstances, why am I able to feel gratitude? Maybe it's because I'm a pastor, called by God, and, because of that, God has given me some kind of special ability to be grateful. Or, maybe it doesn't have anything to do with my being a pastor at all, but maybe I'm just kind of a Pollyanna by nature, you know, always annoyingly happy all the time.

No, and no! I most definitely don't have any special "pastoral" gift of gratitude, given to me by God, and even though it's true that I can be awfully cheery at times, at other times, I do struggle to maintain an optimistic outlook, just like most people.

So, if it's not my circumstances, and it's not my nature... why *do* I feel gratitude?

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Did you notice, in our scripture lesson – a passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians – that the Apostle Paul *also* is feeling some gratitude? In fact, expressing gratitude is the way he begins his whole letter: "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints," Paul writes, "and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers."

So the Apostle Paul is also feeling some gratitude this morning, and, being a pretty wise person, being an Apostle and all, I bet he'd be able to shed some light on where that gratitude comes from.

As our portion of Paul's letter unfolds, just in these eight verses or so, Paul makes an interesting move. He *begins* by talking about gratitude, but he *ends* by talking about the nature of Jesus Christ. The passage concludes like this: "And God has put all things under Christ's feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." Somehow, in the course of just eight little verses, Paul has shifted from gratitude... to Jesus.

[Sing "Give Me Jesus"]

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So *where* does my gratitude come from? Where does *anyone's* gratitude come from, for that matter? I think the Apostle Paul has the answer for us: it's all about who Jesus is. As it turns out, gratitude and Jesus have a lot to do with each other; you might even say that the two are inextricably linked.

Listen again to these words from the end of our passage: "And God has put all things under Christ's feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

Why are we able to feel grateful? Because... it's not about us. It's not about us at all. It's about Christ. God has put the whole world in Christ's hands. If we can trust that, if we can start to believe it, that everything, I mean *everything*, is in Christ's hands – from our sick loved ones to our children to our jobs to our health to our nation – if we can start to believe that, then gratitude kind of just starts to *happen*. When we begin to see that it's not all about us, that it's about Jesus who is holding it all, we find that we don't have to manage or manipulate or force anything or try really hard so things will turn out just so, that we don't have to have all the answers or have it all figured it out. Heck, we can be as confused as ever, and that would be okay, too. Because Christ holds everything, *everything*, and so we can... relax. We can breathe. We can let go. We can trust that someone bigger and smarter and more gracious and more loving holds it all together.

And from trusting in that, from resting in this promise that God has made to us – that everything, *everything*, is in Christ's hands – from *this* flows our gratitude. We can be grateful that Christ, and not us, as the old song goes, "has got the whole world in his hands."

Thanks be to God!

[Sing "The Whole World Is in God's Hands"]