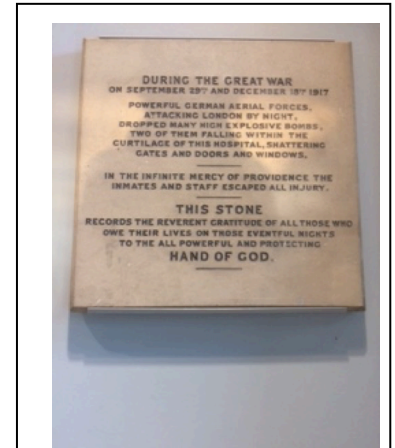


In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

“This stone records the reverent gratitude of all those who owe their lives on these eventful nights to the all-powerful and protective HAND OF GOD.”



I noticed this plaque on the wall of the building that now houses the Imperial War Museum in London, last Thursday when Steve and I were visiting the museum with our son. The eventful nights in question were during September and December of 1917, when the building which was then a hospital, was bombed by the Germans. The stone records that the gates, doors and windows were all shattered, but not one life was lost, nor were any persons injured. This miracle is credited to the power and protection of the Hand of God, and a stone was inscribed and placed as a reminder to all who visit the building to that effect.

Over a hundred years after these events, I was able to stand in front of that declaration of gratitude and feel the force of the words speak to me down through the century.

“This stone records the reverent gratitude (dot, dot, dot)”

I wonder what you would add to the dot, dot, dot if you had the services of a stonemason.

This evening, the Lenten address focuses on the sometimes neglected spiritual discipline that is “gratitude”.

I say sometimes neglected because often we get caught up in reflections on sin, repentance and forgiveness, yet it is only natural that the consequence of these three should be gratitude - the quality of being thankful, alongside a readiness to show appreciation for kindness and a readiness to return kindness

Gratitude is so much more than being thankful. Reading the on line version of “Psychology Today” I came across this:

“Gratitude is an emotion expressing appreciation for what one has – as opposed to, for instance, a consumer driven emphasis on what one wants or thinks they need. Tossing off the half-hearted “thanks” won’t cut it – deep

gratitude has to come from within in a meaningful way.”  
([www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com), 2019)

In another online study this time from the “gratefulness team” at [www.gratefulness.org](http://www.gratefulness.org) I came across Mr Robert Emmons, who it is claimed, is perhaps the world’s leading scientific expert on gratitude. Intrigued I read on, to find out that Mr Emmons was actually quoting a Benedictine monk, Br David. Even more intrigued that a scientific expert would be quoting a Christian brother I read this: “There are two qualities that belong in our basic definition of gratitude – the first is appreciation, you recognise that something is valuable to you, which has nothing to do with its monetary worth. The second quality is that gratitude is freely given to you.”

Mr Emmons adds two further qualities – firstly that gratitude is an “affirmation of goodness” and secondly that “the sources of this goodness are outside of ourselves”. (The Gratefulness Team, 2019)

So the practice of gratitude crosses the religious life, and the scientific life. It is a way of life that we can read about in our Bibles, and is most frequently referred to within the poetry of the Psalms. However, the Apostle Paul is particularly keen to persuade the early Christians that, despite the persecution, the hardship and general difficulties that surrounded them, they were to live gratefully. For example:

In Philippians 4: 6 -7 we read, “<sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (NRSV)

And again, writing to Timothy, in the first letter, chapter 4 and v 4, Paul writes, “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with gratitude, for it is sanctified by God’s word and by prayer”

And what I find fascinating is that the Greek word translated “thanksgiving” in Philippians and “gratitude” in the letter to Timothy, is the same. It is the word *eucharistias*, from which we get the word “Eucharist” which is the heart of our Christian worship and life, commemorating the last supper, the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Every day of every week, there is within this church, a eucharist which is in turn an expression of the spiritual discipline of gratitude. And just as taking part in the eucharist concludes with us being commanded to go out to others, carrying the Christ within us, so the discipline of gratitude is also to be expressed to others.

When we see the world with the eyes of gratitude, we see the world with resurrection eyes. When we practice gratitude we see the places where God is moving, and we focus on them. When we practice gratitude, it is not so much counting our blessings, more like savouring our blessings.

In the book by Erik Willits, he encourages the reader to consider Lent as a “journey of discovery by addition, subtraction, and introspection” (Willits, 2013).

It can be tempting during such a long period of reflection to focus on the last of his ideas, that of introspection. We can look long and deep and hard into our lives and do not one thing about what is revealed there. With God we can also begin to practice the disciplines of addition and subtraction – there are I am sure, many things in our lives that God would have us say, do, see, think, feel that need to be subtracted. There are equally, many things God might call is to add into our lives, and one of those might be to accept the gift of gratitude as we continue to surrender our lives to love, to life in all its fullness, and to God.

How do we do this?

We look to the person of Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith as it is written in Hebrews 12, v1-2 who “for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Three memorable times are recorded in the gospels when Jesus publicly expressed the discipline of gratitude.

One was his prayer of thanksgiving before he broke the bread and fish and fed 5000.

Again he looked to heaven and gave thanks to God the Father immediately before the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Thirdly, on the night that he was betrayed, when he was at supper with his friends, he took bread, gave thanks and broke it (Luke 22:19 NRSV).

These were not wishy washy, fuzzy wuzzy remember to say thank you moments. As our psychologist friend reminded us, “deep gratitude has to come from within and in a meaningful way.”

Jesus, knowing what he was about, knowing full well what each step towards Jerusalem would bring, knowing the Father’s will, and knowing the full implications for the whole world of his actions, went about his life fully immersed in the discipline of gratitude, and he calls us as his followers to do the same.

Yes, but how?

We are to incorporate gratitude into our prayer life, through daily reflection (sometimes known as the examen) and in so doing, become attuned to the grace of God in our lives. A simple question:

What am I most grateful for today?

The master stonemason is ready with chisel in hand to help you complete the stone plaque that begins with these words:

“This stone records the reverent gratitude of.....”

In a moment of quiet let us turn our hearts and minds to God and offer Him our reverent gratitude.

Rev’d Julie Lomas

31/3/2019

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