

Date: 2013-11-24

West Valley Presbyterian Church
Levels of Gratitude
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann

I have to apologize to all of you who are tea drinkers or Canadian out there because I am going to be talking about coffee a little bit today, and I know that Canadians and certain other different kinds of people don't drink coffee...they drink tea. So if you can just substitute the word tea for coffee every time you hear, maybe you'll get something out of this talk this morning.

Anybody who knows me at all knows that I can't function a day out of the week without my coffee. I am a regular coffee addict. I love coffee...I love the way it tastes...I love the way it smells... I love the way coffee beans look before you grind them up...all shiny and brown sitting in a burlap bag...and drinking coffee out of a thick heavy mug comforts me, for some reason. It warms my innards...it relaxes me...has the opposite affect for me than for many people...and drinking it out of a thick heavy mug makes me feel like I have all the time in the world to write a best selling novel, or sit with my mug and read a book....it puts me in good space. Coffee is really the reason why I am Presbyterian

and not a Mormon.

After a rather harrowing weekend last week, in which I had surgery and Tim got very sick, (we are absolutely fine now...thanks for your prayers and concern) I decided that I needed some pampering and I invested with great glee in an espresso maker for the church office here...that had a milk foamer included with the espresso/latte maker in the same box and for the same price as I would just get the coffee maker. And I got to tell you, this milk foamer....it is amazing.

The only thing is...and I found this out *after* I bought this thing...and I think this is why it was on **sale**...was that you can't buy the little coffee pods for this machine in stores.

And of course, I tried to order online, and the site wouldn't accept my password. Every have that happen? *I think I have a gift for choosing the lamest passwords ever...ones that anyone could hack into...like 1,2,3,4,5,6.*

Anyway, I had to call the customer service NESPRESSO number finally... I told the man I just wanted to order some coffee. And he proceeds to tell

me all of the different strengths variations of coffee that I could purchase. He had a list from 1-10 of different strengths and possibilities– 1 being a very weak blend with a lemony twist (for some reason), to a 5 that was your medium blend, to a 10 that was robust bold and strong. And all of these distinctions, even though overwhelming, helped me appreciate coffee ALL THE MORE ...I am totally into this now and even though I purchased #5 so that all normal people can come through the office and use this machine...next time I order I am going for a number 10 – robust, bold and strong. That’s my goal.

And it got me started thinking about gratitude, as I got ready to talk to you. **If we had a gratitude scale...from 1-10...where would your gratitude be, this morning?** You know, I have to confess, my gratitude is often at a one or two...pretty weak...with a lemony twist – I can kind of be a sour lemon. I can look at what is wrong, and focus on what the problems are and think the worst. I decided to call this...

DISHWATER FLAVOR GRATITUDE #1

Ever have coffee that tastes like dishwater? Its coffee...its got a brown tint to it...but it just doesn’t do it. And with gratitude, I can be very weak, just like that #1 level of coffee. *It really isn’t gratitude at all, as*

much as brown water isn't coffee. So many of my days I spend thinking about where I need to go, what I still need to get, have to have, want to achieve, or master and all this robs me of being fully present in the moment. Its so easy to do that...to be preoccupied like this...especially at this time of year. The media and marketing pull us into this frenzy of never being completely satisfied, and sometimes it can just end up being a way of life.

Someone has suggested that if you are a retailer, you really don't want to place too much emphasis on the Thanksgiving holiday.

After all, Thanksgiving is not about giving and receiving gifts--it's about being thankful for what you already have. And they said **“that is bad for corporate America.”**

But what's bad for corporate America is actually great for the soul. To be thankful is to be as rich and bold and full as a soul can possibly be. A strong cup of espresso gratitude is what fuels the Christian life.

That's why Hurry and preoccupation, puts us at a #1 on the gratitude scale, (dishwater gratitude) because we don't have time to be in the present moment and take in what God has done...the gifts that are ours already... not what we hope they will be in the future.

Now I've shared with you before that the ancient Jews, were mandated by law to thank God 100 times a day. That's a lot of times a day...it was supposed to be integrated into all of life! Praise and thanksgiving in our

lives must be a really important component in our Christian walk if praise was so important for the Jews.

And yet I know that I can go through a whole day without thanking God for anything at all. Or I can mouth the words, “Come ye thankful people come” in that hymn, and not feel it...not sink down into gratitude easily. I am at a #1 *so often*because ***I am thinking about what is next, rather than what has already been given.***In order to start moving up to a 10 on that thankfulness meter...I have to stop ...pause, and just be present in the here and now and absorb what is...not what I hope will be.

So hard for some of us to do this...to push the pause button...and the delete button....delete anxious preoccupation...and focus on what is.

And see the gifts all around us. **MARVA** sent me a great quote this last week from a pastor... in his words, **“I used to take every new day for granted. Now I realize that each new day is a gift of God’s grace; and it is this day I need to focus on. It is full of possibilities – not just responsibilities – for relationships and for surprises.”**

- R. Jack Hansen and Jerry P. Haas Again, not good for corporate America, but great for the soul.

Let’s move up to #5 on the gratitude scale...

FIRM & MILD FLAVORED GRATITUDE #5

This is a bit of a bolder flavor of gratitude than the #1 dishwasher brown tinted variety. This actually has some flavor, even though its not as bold as it might be. *#5 on the gratitude scale is that even when my circumstances are not in line with feeling particularly grateful, I am going to firmly decide to thank God anyway.* I am going to exercise a bit of gratitude.....and be firm about a work out plan for getting more gratitude in my life.

God's goodness never changes. God mercies are new every morning. I can always praise God, even if my circumstances are less than optimal. I might not feel grateful, but *at least I am aware that I want to be.* And so, because I want to be grateful, with my mouth, I begin to praise God.

Thanksgiving comes out of a context just like this. Thanksgiving has been an annual tradition since **1863, when President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national day of "Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."**

What was the context of that proclamation?

Lincoln had lost a son many years before, the boy barely more than a toddler when he died.

Then he lost another son, and Lincoln was in grief.

His wife was emotionally troubled and spent money they did not have. His subordinates were insubordinate, convinced he was out of his depth and that they could do a better job at the presidency than he could.

And his country had split...boys from Vermont and Maine fighting it out against boys from Georgia and Tennessee.

It was against that backdrop that Abraham Lincoln decided to say thank you. Amid all the pain, a man of such profound grief made a statement of such profound gratitude.

He knew that God was worthy to be praised no matter what his own circumstances might dictate.

Sometimes as Christians we have to choose gratitude before we feel

it; to increase the boldness and flavor of our gratitude we begin to thank and praise God, even when we don't want to. And when we do this in obedience to scripture, "**Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you**" often our feelings will begin to eventually line up with our words. That's why level #5 is firm and mild. I may have only a mild sense of God's goodness but I am firmly resolved to begin to praise God anyway because scripture

tells me to do it. When we express gratitude, eventually we begin to *feel more grateful*. And sometimes its hard to do because our MO is to complain, and criticize...and we've got to clear out those weeds of negativity, and complaint so that we can give gratitude a little bit of room to grow.

So, in handing out the bands to you this morning, this has a dual purpose. The first of course is to pray for the Service Worship Conference on March 8. We can't do anything without prayer. God arranged it so that our prayers are his conduit for action.

But I want you to do something else with these bands as well. After we decided to hand these out to you today, I heard this story that I thought was so cool. So put on the bands, if you haven't already and heres the story...

A pastor Will Bowen, a Kansas City minister, offered to his congregation some bands, just like the bands we handed out with a challenge to go ***21 days without complaining***. Each time one of them complained, they had to switch the bracelet to their other wrist and start again from day one.

"It was a simple but effective metacognitive awareness training," reports Tim Ferriss of the HUTTINGTON POST. "The effects were immediate and life-changing."

Complaining, Bowen suggests in his book [A COMPLAINT FREE WORLD](#), is a habit which can be broken. And once broken, one can be liberated to enjoy a life of greater gratitude.

According to his [website](#), his idea struck a real chord. His organization has, to date, distributed more than **10 million Complaint Free bracelets to people in over 100 different countries.**

And according to research, it can take as little as 21 days to replace an old habit with a new one. Switching the bracelet from one wrist to the other after each complaint, until the bracelet eventually stays put for 21 days, is a simple and easy exercise that yields huge rewards.

As Pastor Bowen puts it, "**Don't be an ouch looking for a hurt.**" Take the 21 day challenge to help reset your mind's default setting from the negative to the positive.

So you can use your bands in this way...and allow gratitude to move in.

And then what *I would add to all of this, is the power of the words of scripture...*that go beyond just a metacognitive technique but are actually powerful to change us...that when the negative starts to seep in.... when those weeds of pessimism start to crowd out the joy and delight of gratitude you commit to memory the scripture we read today and you say it aloud..."**Whatever I do in word or deed, I will do it all in the name of**

the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

(Colossians 3:17) As negativity seeks to get ahold of you, just pause, and recognize the God who is with you, the God who knows you and the God of Jesus Christ who will never leave you or forsake you, and then say these words. As you continue to do this, switching the band, reciting scripture, your gratitude quotient will increase...you'll watch your gratitude dial go up from a **#1 DISHWATER Level Gratitude...**to a **#5 Mild and Firm Gratitude...**to a **#10 Bold and Robust Gratitude**

This is right where the author of Psalm 30 was that day ... David was at a **#10. David had a Bold and Robust Gratitude.** It was a strong espresso blend gratitude – full of flavor and energy. Why? Because he knew that without God he wouldn't even be here. He knew that without God his bones would be rotting in a grave. He knew that without God he had nothing to live for. He had been down to the pit...and did he climb out of that pit himself? Does he give himself any credit? No. He knows that God is the only reason he's alive and able to sing his praise....and that's true of all of us... we just lose sight of this truth in our day to day lives.

When you've been at the end of your rope and been rescued by the One who rescues us all...and you know it...you are a #10 on gratitude...You get that

if it weren't for the Lord of life, there wouldn't be a you...Listen to these words...don't they just inspire your heart?

I've got to give YOU CREDIT God. ...All you saints! Sing your hearts out to God! Thank Him to his face!...I called out to you God. I laid my case before you...YOU DID IT...you changed wild lament into whirling dance; You ripped off my black mourning band and decked me with wildflowers. I'm about to burst with song; I can't keep quiet about you. God my God...I can't thank you enough.” (Psalm 30 selections)

Who is David giving credit to? I've got to give you credit God!

God...my God. I can't thank you enough!

That's full bodied espresso gratitude...bold and full of flavor.

I love that part where it says, **“I am about to burst with song”**

It reminds of opening a carbonated drink or a bottle of champagne that bursts open and bubbles out...you can't put it back in the can or the bottle no matter how hard you try. Gratitude inspired by the Holy is just that abundant and alive...it spills over and splashes out. That's the kind of Holy Spirit inspired gratitude that let Paul and Silas sing in the prison after they'd been beaten with rods; that's the kind of Holy Spirit inspired gratitude that let Stephen to praise God as he was being stoned and forgive those who were stoning him; that's the kind of Holy Spirit inspired gratitude that let David,

in the midst of being chased into exile write the book of psalms, so many of them songs of praise that we still use today.

Espresso Full Bodied Gratitude Level 10 is what Psalm 30 is all about. I hope you are inspired to sing the closing song today. I hope you burst with song...and whirl with dance...and recognize that gratitude to the Lord is our due response to a wonderful God who continues...etc...

(Story here maybe)