

“Gratitude”
Sermon by Pastor Tom Warren
Peace United Church of Christ
November 24, 2013

Every once in a while on Sunday mornings, and in other opportunities for worship, I make the decision to leave the preaching up to you. That is what we are going to do today. I will start us out, but what I want to do is invite everyone to just take a moment, those of you who would like, to think about, and then to share, one thing that you are feeling thankful for today because this is, of course, the season of thanksgiving, as we start to recognize that Thanksgiving, and even Halloween, is starting to be eclipsed by the rush to the Christmas season and all that, but let's not lose sight of Thanksgiving and all the blessings that we know and have experienced in our lives. So, I invite you now to start thinking about one thing that you are very, very grateful for on this particular morning, or at this particular point in your life.

I will start by sharing with you a story that I have shared with some of you in bits and pieces. It was really just about a year ago, in late October or early November, when I got a phone call in my church office in Tennessee from my doctor. Most of you know that, when your doctor is calling you, that is not a good sign. I called my doctor back and, long story short, my doctor informed me that after my first ever colonoscopy, I had 3 polyps and one of them was cancer. For any of you who have been through that kind of news, you know that kind of news throws you for a loop like you've never experienced before. If you had told me before I got the news that I thought I was invincible, that those types of things don't happen to me, I would have told you I don't think that. That's not what I think. I know that anything can happen to anybody, and I don't think I'm invincible. What I learned, in fact, when I got that news, was that I thought I was invincible because, when you get that kind of news, the first response is—how could this happen to me. The news, of course, in a situation like that is bad and throws you for a loop, and you end up thinking all kinds of strange thoughts and painful thoughts, but I am healthy. The surgery that they did went fine. I have nine inches less of my colon, but I am healthy and everything went well.

The benefit of that experience for me was the benefit of gratitude because I think what happens in our lives, or at least what happened in my life, is that we very easily lose sense of what we are thankful for, and that primarily takes the form of (at least in my life) taking things for granted. We don't become unthankful people, but we do forget about what we are thankful for because we begin to take lots of things for granted, so there are a couple of things I am thankful for, and I learned from that experience of being diagnosed with cancer, and going through the surgery and everything, that one of the things (and I learned this from the hospital) is that I am grateful for my digestive system. We take that for granted, but when you go through surgery, and especially when they cut on your intestines, it's all about the digestive system, and we begin to learn what a miraculous body we have and, as you know, especially with the type of surgery that I went through, they are not letting you out until it is all working. I love where humility goes when you are in the hospital. It goes right out the window because they told me “When you are ready to have your system move, call the nurse and let her know”, so I began to think about things we take for granted—our bodies, the health of our bodies, how we treat our bodies, what we put into our bodies—all of that. Our bodies are a gift from God and it is a miraculous, miraculous “engine”, if you will. It keeps us healthy, keeps us alive and so forth, and we always have different struggles with our bodies. I have a lot of gratitude now for my body. I think a little more about it. I don't take it quite as much for granted as I did, but I'm very grateful for it.

The second thing I want to share is that, going through that surgery, and all that it made me feel, really reminded me of what I've always thought, and that is that life is about relationships. It really is people who make our lives meaningful. We live in this very consumerist culture. We all like our things, and I have things that I like and so on and so forth. Those don't really matter. When you are in the hospital and you are sick like that, you start to realize that it is your family that matters. It is your friends who call you. It is all those people in your life. All the other stuff doesn't matter a bit. It is parents, siblings, friends, church folks, cards that you get in the mail, all of those simple things in life that we sometimes take for granted and, through an event like that, we are reminded that life, and the meaning of life, really comes from relationships, so this Thanksgiving, a year after I went through my, sort of, trauma, with that, I am remaining grateful for relationships—my children, my wife, my wider family—even my three sisters! Two of them are sitting right over there. Yes, it is really family and relationships that make a difference in our lives, so that's what I'm feeling like today and, as we move towards Thanksgiving, we can get "lost" in the busyness of the holiday and of the Christmas season.

I'd like to ask you, those of you who would like to share, what you are feeling particularly thankful for on this day:

Dale and Dorothy Benschhoff: God's healing power and family.

Pastor Warren: So, we are feeling thankful for God's healing power and for family.

Dorothy Meeks: Our new pastor, Rev. Tom Warren.

Pastor Warren: Thank you. I'm thankful for that, too.

Cindy Spillers: Being born in the United States of America, for the freedom, and privileges and wonderful gifts this country has to offer.

Frances Johnson: Growing up on a farm, God providing the opportunity of being raised by a good, nurturing family, also recently discovering that the reason for feeling the need to be in church every Sunday is to thank God for everything she has.

Miriam Dieterly: Health and family.

Doris Yeattes: Church family, being a part of this church since early childhood. Grateful for the congregation for being a part of her life, meeting her husband through the church and spending almost 60 years together, also for support and guidance received throughout the years. The church has shaped her life and she is thankful for that.

Beverly and Tommy Haithcock: Spending time with her daughter yesterday, decorating for Christmas, spending the whole day together, knowing the health problems her daughter has experienced over the years. Appreciative for "one of the best Christmas presents", her 2 grandchildren, but also having moments of tears due to missing her mom, wishing she could be there to share the experience of time spent with her daughter.

Femi Quakenbush: Her son.

Pastor Warren: Thankful for sons, yes.

Mary Ann Murray: God's creation, our personalities, being in the hospital around very caring ICU

staff, thankful for the medical professionals, people being encouraging for giving her strength, for family and friends being endlessly supportive.

Debbie Shiner: Church family and her two sons.

Ralph Welker: Friends Home Guilford which has seen him through many ordeals.

Susie Cressman's husband: Thankful for Susie and for the opportunity to be married to her.

Mary Lillie: Choir members for helping her get through tough times with Jim's illness.

Virginia Graber: The restoration of Richard's health, being free of kidney stones.

Ellen Mason: All the workings in our church, its members, and for good Samaritans in the community, such as people who offer to pay for purchases for those who find themselves short of money, for family, and for God's ability to heal grief.

Thanks be to God. Amen.