

Gratitude, Rev Linda
Sunday November 21, 21

And here we are on the Sunday before Thanksgiving when the Native Peoples are said to have taught the pilgrims how to plant and harvest in a new land in new soil and the Pilgrims shared their bounty with the Native People and all were grateful.

And today's sermon is about gratitude which has opened itself up to something I did not expect when I sat with hands on keys this last week to write it.

There are of course many types of gratitude, and many that we all know and practice with grace. And then there are others too. The Buddhists specialize in types of gratitude that we do not often discuss.

The Dalai Lama often repeats the Buddhist teaching of being grateful to your enemies by telling his audiences that he is grateful to the Chinese because they gave him training in patience and helped his development as a person. The Dalai Lama writes:

“Even our enemies give us the best training in patience. When we reflect on these holy instructions, in a way we should feel grateful to the Chinese. If we were still living in the same old system, I very much doubt that the Dalai Lama could have become so closely acquainted with worldly reality. I used to live in a very sheltered environment, but now that we are in exile there is no stigma attached to facing reality. In our own country, we could pretend that everything was in order because it was shrouded under a cloak of pomp and show. I had to sit on a high throne assuming the attitude of being the Dalai Lama. . . . It is quite possible that I could have become narrow minded, but because of the Chinese threats and humiliations, I have become a real person. So what happened in Tibet can be seen as a blessing in disguise.”¹

This one seems not impossible to me; I can be grateful to difficult people in my life right? And then I dig deeper and wonder, what about being grateful to the people who are pasting and cutting videos clips of the January 9th insurrection and saying it is similar to the Boston Tea Party and they are similar to Ben Franklin and were working to help us all free from an oppressive regime and my highfaluting ideas go out the window.

For 9 years before he was exiled, the Dalai Lama negotiated with China for his people's welfare. In 1959, during an uprising that led to a massacre, he decided to go into exile and escaped his beloved country enduring sandstorms and snowstorms as he and his party summited 19,000 foot mountain peaks during their 3 week escape. He has lived in exile in India watching his country being dismantled for 58 years. And though I imagine he has

¹ Patrick Fitzgerald. (October 1998). “Gratitude and Justice” *Ethics, Vol. 109, No. 1*

grown this does not mean that he is grateful for what the Chinese have done to Tibet or his beloved people.

Here is what I hear the Dalai Lama saying, Be grateful for this world we live in and what it is teaching us, right now, with every variation and hardship and fear for this will teach you to be more awake.

I though I do not wish on our country what has happened here in the last years and what continues to happen with the erosion of democracy and the rights for the most vulnerable, I can be grateful that this time is teaching me to be more awake, more engaged and more aware and that to get from one day to the next requires incredible gratitude for all this is and much more awareness of who I am and this *who I am* impacts those around me.

There are other kinds of gratitude that we all know, returning favors for those who help us, recognizing all we have and seeing it as enough, being present enough to know how many people care about us and saying thank you, however we say it.

But today, inspired by the Dalai Lama, I want to talk about gratitude as a way of being in the world that asks us not only to be still and awake and aware enough to know what we have.

For the Dalai Lama for instance, who so wants peace and well-being for his people, he believes that gratitude for how the Chinese helped him become who he is not only makes him a better person but also cultivates an environment of peace in which real change can occur.

Gratitude and justice are linked. If I buy you flowers because you cooked me a meal, that is wonderful and good: You give to me, I give to you. But if gratitude is going to make me more aware and present and whole, then I have to do more than that. I have to allow what you do for me and what I do for you to change me. It demands that I see self in other and other in self. It demands that I recognize that we are all set in a pattern of desire and loss and hope and fear that we can only ever survive because we survive together.

Gratitude is the root of justice. For when we know that we are only human because we are human together, then we have to see self in other and other in self. And once we do that, there is no limit to the requests that gratitude will make of us.

So, how might justice and gratitude be linked in relation to Thanksgiving?

Though we eat a ton of food and talk about what we are grateful for on Thanksgiving and that is so dear and heart-opening, how this relates to the Native People's and the Pilgrims is trickier.

What happened in 1621 bears little resemblance to what most Americans are taught in grade school, historians say. There was likely no turkey served. There were no feathered

headdresses worn. And, initially, there was no effort by the Pilgrims to invite the Wampanoags to the feast they'd made possible.²

Just as Native American activists have demanded the removal of Christopher Columbus statues and pushed to transform the Columbus holiday into an acknowledgment of his brutality toward Indigenous people, they have long objected to the popular portrayal of Thanksgiving.

For the Wampanoags and many other American Indians, the fourth Thursday in November is called the Day of Mourning.

Because while the Wampanoags did help the Pilgrims survive, their support was followed by years of a slow, unfolding genocide of their people and the taking of their land.

The Wampanoags, whose name means "People of the First Light" in their native language, trace their ancestors back at least 10,000 years to southeastern Massachusetts, a land they called Patuxet.

In the 1600s, they lived in 69 villages, each with a chief, or sachem, and a medicine man. They occupied a land of plenty, hunting deer, elk and bear in the forests, fishing for herring and trout, and harvesting quahogs in the rivers and bays. They planted corn and used fish remains as fertilizer. In the winter, they moved inland from the harsh weather, and in the spring they moved to the coastlines.

Much of the rest of the history we have learned but there is so much more to learn that we do not know.

And so, if we were to live gratefully and if gratitude is the root of justice, what does this ask of us today as we approach Thanksgiving?

Being grateful to Native Peoples cannot only be about what they *gave us or taught us* but has to call us to justice, to telling the truth about who we are and our privilege while bowing to those our privilege has a legacy of harming, bowing with recognition, with sorrow, with honor, with apology.

And then, rising and blessing the knowing this creates: we are one people only here because we are one people, only full of wonder and hope and possibility because we are one people, all of us. And then, knowing this, what else can arise but words and songs and protests and dances and longings fashioned by justice?

I wonder if we started Thanksgiving this year by giving thanks to all of those who have made us who we are right this minute, those that made us who we are by taking and by

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/11/04/thanksgiving-anniversary-wampanoag-indians-pilgrims/>

giving, by loving and by pushing, by encouraging and by doubting. Because who we are right now is who shows up in this communion, at this welcome table, with this story and shame and love and fear and possibility. Who we are right now, in all that complexity, with all of those regrets and angers and hurts and joys and blessings...whatever they all are, they are us now. And maybe that is the first gratitude. To be grateful for all that brought us to this day, in this body and mind and soul. Just so.

Can we manage that kind of opening in our hearts and minds and see what happens next? Will you be led to action, will you be led to prayer and meditation as you realize more of who you are and who you can still become, will you be led to joy, the simple joy of that remembering that all of it, all of it, has put you right here at this time with your ways of being to make what only you can make possible.

Gratitude makes justice possible. Start here today. Your precious life, your being, just as it is right now, complicit and capable, beautiful and broken, striving and sitting, this is where to start. Here we are my friends. Here we are in these bones. Rise up in your presence and call out to the world that you are here and that you know that without all of it, all of us, all of life, you and here could not be. Bless this moment. Bless this moment and rise up.

I am grateful to you all, every one of you, just as you are, just as we are.

Amen.