



St. Paul's on-the-Hill

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

If you had to guess the theme of this pastoral letter, gratitude would probably be it. And if that was your guess, you'd be right!

While it's a predictable theme for this time of year, surely it is also a timely one. People are soul weary, aren't they, with this pandemic? We have lived, and continue to live through some very challenging circumstances. As a society, we are weary, and sometimes I wonder if that weariness is expressing itself as impatience: impatience with our situation, impatience with others, perhaps even impatience with God. I've also been noticing increasing anger and anxiety in our world. If we could break down the ingredients of those emotions, I suspect we would find a hearty serving of fear, along with a side order of feelings of powerlessness.

What an exhausting space in which to live!

While we are facing real challenges in 2021, what we are living through is no more challenging than the circumstances the Church has faced in the past. Here, I'm thinking especially of the early Church and St. Paul's pastoral letters to them. While he gave different advice to each church in regard to their specific challenges, one message was consistent and universal. Believers, St. Paul said, are to move about in the world as people whose minds and hearts and spirits are focused on thanks and praise:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks;
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess 5:16-18)

That is such a good word from St. Paul, I'm going to repeat it: individually as believers and collectively as a church, we are to cultivate a spirit of thanksgiving because it is God's will for us in Jesus.

God's "willing" this for us definitely feels like a command. Yet as with all God's commands, as we follow them, we discover that His commands are for the sake of our good. Because surely gratitude is one antidote to the challenging emotions of this present moment. Fear wants us to focus on all that might go wrong. Anger and anxiety ruminates on all that has already gone wrong. Gratitude asks that we focus on all that has gone right. Gratitude asks us to remember all that is right with others, with our situation, and with God.

So, modelling St. Paul, in my own pastoral letter to you, I must tell you of the gratitude I feel every time I think of you. Let me say thanks to you, friends:

- Thank you for your faithfulness to God.
- Thank you for your prayers. I cannot emphasize enough the Kingdom power of a praying community, and St. Paul's is filled with people who pray.

- Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your patience with the church as we together lived through shut-downs, changes in ministry and a long interim period.
- Thank you for the patience and generosity you are showing me, as I try to find my way in a community I cannot see, with more urgent matters than I can possibly manage. I'm not able to do it all, and I'm not getting it all right, and though that must be surely frustrating at times, what I hear from you instead is your gratitude or your offers to help. You encourage me.
- Thank you for your stewardship over the past 2 years and your ongoing support of the ministries at St. Paul's, through your time, talent and treasure.
- Thank you for your care for each other. These have been some difficult times, and I see how throughout you have been praying for one another, checking in on and practically caring for one another. I see your acts of mercy and I give thanks.
- Thank you for your care of your neighbours, privately as well as corporately through such things as your support of St. Paul's Food Bank. We want to share the good news of God in Jesus Christ, and your care is part of our testimony as believers.

I give thanks, every time I think of you.

I do believe God is calling our community to a season of intentional thanksgiving:

- grateful thanksgiving and praise to God, for what He has done in the past, and the new things He has begun in our midst today;
- grateful thanksgiving to one another, as an act of love and care;
- grateful expressions of thanks to our neighbours, spreading a spirit of gratitude.

I encourage you to join in Bonnie Belthom's praise project, which details are shared in the news section. I encourage you to write thank you notes to one another, in gratitude for anything: for the gift of that person, for ministry done etc., or to pick up the phone and call. I encourage you to spend intentional time in praise, and to daily count your gratuities before God.

I ask that you join with me in this prayer: that the spirit of our church of St. Paul's on the Hill may be one of praise and thanksgiving.

Yours in Christ,



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News from the Pews

Re-Connect: Community Conversations

Through the month of September, Rev. Stephanie gathered on Zoom with members to discuss various topics. What a gift to meet parishioners! She similarly enjoyed the outdoor gatherings in the parking lot, which gave her the opportunity to talk to people in person.

These gatherings are helpful for our re-envisioning process, as it enables us to listen to one another, discuss needs, share updates on ministries and discern the movement of the Holy Spirit. Rev. Stephanie will be hosting a more fulsome time of conversation once a month over zoom, and asking as many as possible to join as a possible way to listen to one another, answer questions, pray together and communicate parish news. The link will be posted on the parish website under the "Fellowship" tab.

October Community Conversation:

October 13, 7-8:30 pm.

November Community Conversation:

November 17, 7-8:30 pm

Re-Connect: New parish E-blast tool and weekly blast

Our e-blast system was proving difficult to manage, but thanks to Bruce Hampson, we have found a new system that safeguards privacy and resolves our technical problems. Please be patient with us as we work out any kinks. We are also working hard to consolidate our communications into a weekly eblast, to avoid a deluge of emails coming your way.

Re-New: October Teaching Event

We tried our first teaching event, which was a visit from biblical scholar, the Rev. Dr. Gord Oeste. He opened the scriptures for us, speaking about Ezra-Nehemiah in preparation for our fall preaching series. A recording of the talk is available - please email Michele Broad. We had 45 people in attendance over zoom, and it was such a positive community experience, we're going to offer a monthly teaching event with a gifted teacher, speaking on their specialist area.

Our September teaching event focused on the bible. Our October event will address issues of pastoral care, and our November event will focus on renewing worship, specifically focusing on praise and prayer.

October Event: Dr. Wanda Malcolm, psychologist

"Why am I so anxious?" Thursday, October 21st, 7:30-9:00 pm over zoom

Dr. Malcolm is a seminary professor as well as a clinical psychologist with her own busy practice. She will be talking to us about the anxiety that has become almost an endemic part of life right now, helping us to understand the emotions we and/or our loved ones are living with. She will offer strategies as well as a dedicated time to answer your questions. We will send the zoom link out by e-blast.

Re-New: Baptism and Confirmation

We joyfully celebrated the baptism of 5 little ones on Sunday, September 26th. Special thanks to our sidespeople, musicians, and wardens for enabling this second Sunday service to happen. We have more

families coming forward, so we will have a second baptism in November. Please contact Rev. Stephanie for more info. We are also in the process of re-connecting with our confirmation candidates from 2020. Details to follow.

Re-New: Update on worship services - in-person and zoom family service

We are meeting this coming week with the various ministry teams to review our capacity to support a second service. At the time of writing, it seems unlikely that we will have the volunteer capacity, in terms of in-person volunteers, to regularly run a second service right away. We will have more news in time for the Community Conversation in October.

Coming out of conversation with baptismal families as well as a survey, we will likely be trying a zoom service geared for families/children, starting in mid-to-late October. The online worship service will only be 30 minutes. Details will be sent out in the e-blasts. If you are willing to help out or would like to worship with us, please email Rev. Stephanie.

Thanksgiving opportunities:

St. Paul's Food Bank

Thank you for your strong support of this important ministry! St. Paul's Food Bank had a busy summer. From June to the end of August client visits represented 3113 people fed. With Thanksgiving fast approaching, the Food Bank invites you to watch their current needs page on their website to see what items are needing replenishing. Go to www.stpaulsonthehillfoodbank.ca and click the "current needs" tab for details.

Thanksgiving drive to our frontline workers: Ajax-Pickering ICU

SPOTH youth are spearheading a project to express gratitude to our local ICU workers. The youth group goal is to collect 200 \$10 coffee cards. They invite you to write a note of thanks to our frontline workers to include with your card. The youth have written close to 80 notes of thanks, so if you've sent in cards without a note, you're covered. Donations accepted up until October 7th. The youth are thrilled by your support.

Praise Project: "The Lord has been good to me."

Bonnie is inviting you to put your testimony to God's goodness into writing and email them to her; these will be collected into a booklet as an act of praise to God. Some guidelines: write about a need you experienced, tell what God did to meet that need and short summing up, perhaps mention any other blessings that came about because of God's intervention. We're looking for about 500-800 words per entry, and inviting these submissions up to and including Thanksgiving weekend.

To find out more, or to email your submission (with PRAISE in the subject line of your email) contact Bonnie at bonbelthom@gmail.com.