

*“The Path of Gratitude”*  
May 3, 2020

**Gathering Music**                      Shana Aisenberg

**Welcome and Lighting the Chalice**                      Rev. Betsy Tabor

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.  
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.  
Here we seek healing and wholeness.  
Welcome, all.

Welcome to this service called “The Path of Gratitude.” We are delighted to welcome Judy Ringer this morning. I became aware of Judy some twenty years ago, shortly after she made a pivot from running a hot real estate firm to what looked, from a distance, like a deeply spiritual life of guiding, coaching, teaching, writing and singing – not to mention a black belt in aikido. At the time, I too was ready to leave the private sector and wanted to hear her story. Coffee that morning with Judy was a turning point for me. A gift. Thank you, Judy. [View Judy’s introduction on recording of service.]

**Centering Music** Modah Ani (“I Give Thanks”)    Setting - Shana Aisenberg

**“A Path to Gratitude”**                      Judy Ringer

Take a moment to think about what you're thankful for in your life....What came to mind?

- ◆ A person?
- ◆ A pet?
- ◆ Good health?
- ◆ Home and family?
- ◆ Work?
- ◆ Friends?
- ◆ Peace of mind?
- ◆ Life itself?

In life's *ki* moments, another sure path to presence is the path of Gratitude. As soon as you decide to feel grateful, you return to the present. What better way than gratitude to feel fully aware and influence your inner and outer world for the better?

One of my favorite people in the outer world was the late Rev. Gordon Allen, of St. John’s Church in Portsmouth, who used to share a prayer at our weekly Rotary meeting. You may know it:

Some would eat but have no meat,  
Some have meat but cannot eat,  
We have meat and we can eat,  
And so the Lord be thanked.

Whenever I hear this statement of thanks, I think how *simple* true gratitude is. While striving to improve is commendable, I can become obsessive in the pursuit of perfection. And I begin to focus on what's missing instead of the abundance in which I live.

And so to help counterbalance my tendency toward worry, fear, and striving, I've begun a practice I call "cultivating gratitude."

When I wake each morning, still lying in bed, I ask myself: *What am I grateful for today?* Just like physical exercise, this is a warm-up for my *spirit* and a lovely way to start the day.

Over the years, my gratitude list has grown. I usually start with the same one, two or three core blessings, and look for new ones each day.

During the day, I take a moment to remember a blessing or two. I feel stronger, younger, and happier when I do this. I am reminded that even in the most challenging situations, there is this ... *ki* ... moment, this ... now. We can learn to be thankful for each moment of life -- the joy and the pain, the laughter and the sorrow. The gift of life.

What do you have to be grateful for today? If it's a person, why not tell them? Do you know it takes about two minutes to write a thank you note. So first, *Count* your blessings, then let someone know they're on your list. Make their day. Go ahead!

**Hymn** "When Our Heart is in a Holy Place"

**Reading** "Small Kindnesses" by Danusha Laméris (read by Rod Forsman)

**A Time for All Ages** Marion Posner

**"Count your Blessings"** Sung by Judy Ringer

**Joys & Concerns**

**"Immortal Life"** Violin/Guitar - Shana Aisenberg

**Meditation** - Rev. Betsy

We give thanks. For sun shining, shoots lengthening, trees leafing out, for birdsong louder and sweeter than we remember.

We are grateful to *be* here, still here,  
still weathering our collective ups and downs,  
still feeling the frustrations of our different opinions of what is best,  
still feeling the solidarity of the somber concern everyone shares.

In these days when we feel confused and unsure,  
when we can feel lost in the darkness,  
may the light of love brighten our path.

May it quiet the anxiety that clouds our vision.  
 May the light of love help us find what we need  
 to step forward with courage and peace of mind.  
 Especially in this time of trouble, let us drink deeply of this life, more aware and more  
 grateful with each day. Blessed be.

[Respond to Joys and Concerns]

“**Spirit of Life**” (presented by the All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, DC)

“**A Grateful Heart**” Judy Ringer

"Go ahead. Play. Let me see you run!" Mimi cheered us on. I was seven or eight years old, playing with my cousins in the back yard of my grandmother's house in Oak Park, Illinois. Mimi (my Aunt Mary) was probably 30-something at the time and in her wheelchair, where she'd been since a spinal disease struck at age thirteen.

My aunt was an amazing person who had a tremendous influence on my life. Quite often, I remember with gratitude something she said or did that gave me courage and let me see how able I was in so many ways.

For example, Mimi loved to see us run and play. Occasionally, when she was out of her wheelchair, we'd ask if we could sit in it and wheel ourselves around. But she'd say, "No, use your legs! Be happy you can walk and run. Go ahead, let me see you."

Her bright love, affection, and hugeness of spirit were contagious. She knew we were blessed, and we learned from her to appreciate the gifts we took for granted. Mimi knew she was blessed, too - with love, with family, and in particular with a mother and father who made sure she was cared for and lived a full life, even when doctors said she wouldn't. Mimi lived in gratitude and shared it.

I've often heard that we teach gratitude by having gratitude; that *it is a gift in itself* to live with a grateful heart. I'm thankful to have known people like Mimi, who *taught* gratitude by *being* grateful.

Who are you thanking today? Who are you grateful to? For? How many blessings can *you* count before you fall asleep? What seven- or eight-year-old is watching you and learning how to feel thankful, happy, and blessed?

David W: I think of my step-grandmother who was in a wheelchair for 40 years due to a disease. The amazing thing was that I never, ever heard her complain once about her condition. She was a very serene person. The fact that she never once said, "I wish I could" or "I'm so sorry I can't" is such a lesson in life to know.

Kathy Bi: I had a brother, Peter, and he was quite sick near the end of his life. But he had a message for his family, and it was to say "yes" to life. I pull that out of the hat sometimes when my sisters can be discouraged or frustrated. I try to remind folks in my

circle of friends and family that you can always just say “yes,” you know? Just go with it. And you will work your way through the difficulties.

Betsy L: I was thinking, Judy, as you told that story, about my Aunt Peg who was a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher here in Tamworth. Many people my age know of her. She took them all outside, never mind that she really did teach spelling. When I came up here, she’s been my model of retirement. She retired fairly early, at 63, and then had this wonderful vibrant life. She was one of the original members of the Conservation Commission. She just did all kinds of things here in Tamworth. As I moved here up here fulltime a year ago, she’s been my guiding light.

Eleanor J: I had a longtime friend, Janice, who was in a wheelchair for 35 yrs before she died. There was no point where she’d really complain. When you’d come to visit, it was a wonderful visit. She read, she was interested in travel and going places with her husband, who helped her immensely, unbelievably. And I always felt better after a visit with her, much better when I realized how courageous she was. After she died, her daughter came to me and asked if I’d accompany the solo vocalist on the piano at the funeral. Stan had remembered that I used to play as a child. So I said yes. How could I say no? And I’ll tell you, it took all the courage I had to do it. If this woman could live 35 years in a wheelchair and make other people feel good, I could at least gather enough courage to make this happen for her and her family. She motivated me greatly. I was scared to death, but I did it.

Amanda H: I would say my son Declan is fearless. He reminds me that I can do just about anything, because why not? I think that’s his mantra in life: “Why not?” Judy’s aunt Mimi reminds me of Declan.

Kathy Bu: I think of a friend, Sarah, who went from being a marathon runner to...now she calls herself the Pied Piper. As she enters the Choral Society room and inches herself along, a long line behind her, she never complains. She does everything, and she’s a role model. She’s really inspiring.

Diane S: Hello from California. I just want to say that my precious friend Sandra C introduced me to UUFES, and I’m so extremely grateful to be able to join you guys from here. As Judy was saying, it just feels so intimate to be with you. I’m very grateful for all of you at UUFES.

Go ahead. Be Thankful. Just decide to be. *Then...*list the reasons.

**Call for the Offering** - David Wilkins

**“How Can I Keep From Singing”** (commemorating Pete Seeger’s birthday) - Shana

**Closing Words:**

Shared Affirmation

Reminders

- Plant sale: Divide and pot perennials because we may have a Plant Sale.
- Explanation of break-out groups at coffee hour
- People have asked for more movement in the service, and so we'll dance....

**Hymn** “ ‘Tis a Gift to Be Simple” (with movement!)

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth  
The warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts.

**Benediction**

With a grateful heart, be well.  
With a grateful heart, be safe and strong.  
And with a grateful heart, let us live and love fully.

**Postlude**      "Hunt the Squirrel"      All dance around the May Pole.

This service can be viewed until 90 days following May 3 at:

[https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/1ZRLBZTd221IQYGd0QbbVocDQ4Hpeaa81yRK-vdezK\\_7rj2ztYJU72iI2nmFH-mf](https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/1ZRLBZTd221IQYGd0QbbVocDQ4Hpeaa81yRK-vdezK_7rj2ztYJU72iI2nmFH-mf)

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