

Today ends our four-week sermon series thinking about stewardship and worship using one Psalm, Psalm 50, entitled, "To know God is to thank God." Pastor Elaine summed everything up so beautifully last week reminding us that we're God's covenant people called to fulfill our promise to love God, others and ourselves. This morning I'd like for us to think about thankfulness- not in an obligatory way due to us being so close to the cultural holiday, Thanksgiving, but rather in response to God's love and mercy in our lives. True worship is thanksgiving. Before we read our one verse for today, let us first pray. **PRAY. READ Psalm 50:14.**

While Pastor Elaine may have given me way too much credit last week saying that I would tie everything together for today's message, I'd like to say, "Come, Holy Spirit, come!" The last time I preached I asked us to prayerfully reflect this month on what we can offer to God in true thanksgiving. Last time I also mentioned eight questions of leadership given to me and other colleagues on a recent retreat. In the world of leadership development, there is something called appreciative inquiry. I've practiced appreciative inquiry as a way for a group, such as a Board of Directors, to focus on identifying strengths & successes to drive positive change & innovation. However, I had never heard the term *appreciative integrity* until preparing for today's sermon. According to the internet, appreciative integrity means *to offer an outward expression of thanks that is commensurate with the gratitude in our hearts*. When it comes to giving thanks appreciative integrity helps you match up what you do on the outside with what you feel on the inside. "To be integrated

is to be whole. There's a congruence of mind, body, and spirit. All the parts are connected as one. To be disintegrated is to be pulled apart. Mind, body, or spirit work separately, disconnected one from the other. When this takes place, there is a lack of cohesion between what we believe and say and what we do. Hence appreciative integrity means to give back to God out of sheer thankfulness; not because God needs what we have to offer, but because our gratitude is so acute that we can't hold it in; the gratitude must be released with a heartfelt expression lest it cripple our spirits! We may not be able nor expected to maintain ebullient gratitude, but noticing, paying attention, and giving thanks to God- thanks for all that we have and all that we are can be a way of life" ([link](#)). Here's my question. But what if you don't have gratitude in your heart? What if life completely stinks and you feel like there's no sacrifices of thanksgiving to offer to God?

I remember as a young adult I would volunteer at a soup kitchen once a week. I met a guy named James. I don't remember much about him, but I remember his smile. Young Jennifer made an assumption that because James was experiencing homelessness, James would be understandably be feeling low. Yet every week at breakfast James would come through the line, and he would verbally give thanks to God for his life. He would smile and sing praises for what God had done and continued to do. This blew my mind. How could someone with nothing be so grateful? Now let me be clear. James wasn't super human. He had all kinds of feelings. I'm sure he complained at times and yet, he witnessed to me and to several of my friends, as he would always begin with gratitude to God. Gratitude

for waking him up that morning. Gratitude that he knows Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Gratitude for having volunteers who showed up early to serve. Gratitude for fresh, boiled eggs, hot grits and donated treats from Atlanta Bread Company and Panera. Gratitude for his chosen family and friends. James would often stay behind and clean out the showers or mop the kitchen or take out the trash and scrub the grits pan. He didn't have a lot of money to give, but he had time, talents and a strong work ethic. He wanted to give back out of gratitude. I knew that because of his attitude and how he treated other people. He sang as he wiped down the tables and chairs. While I couldn't pick James out in a crowd today, he has been one of my greatest teachers on offering sacrifices of thanksgiving to God. And I continue to witness many other James, who go by different names, here at Triune and beyond.

Here's the point of Psalm 50. Don't just go through the motions! It's like when people stop cursing or gossiping when the preacher walks by. Really? Yes, it may be out of respect but who are you trying to fool? Don't be fake. God can tell when our hearts aren't really in it! Whether in Psalm 50, the Gospel According to Luke, or in our own public worship, God does not desire mere outwardly proper worship. He wants heartfelt worship that is according to God's will. Psalm 50:14 calls for genuine worship. A "sacrifice of thanksgiving" must come from a heart deeply affected by God's mercies and be accompanied by a life of obedience. Here in this one verse lies "the central point of the entire psalm: offer God praise as he has commanded in Scripture and fulfill your vows, not only for show, but inwardly. [In other words, God wants us to keep our

promises.] In this way, God will receive the glory, the goal of public worship. This is what God expects of his people—then and now—to glorify God both through proper sacrifice as he has commanded, and with all of the heart, mind, and soul” (Scott McDermand, [link](#)). All this to say, “what God wants and what, in fact, God needs are these things: our gratitude, our confessions of faith, our prayers for help, and our praise. God does not need these things for God’s own self. But God does need these things for God’s mission. And, God needs our offerings for God’s mission, too. God does, in reality, desire that we be generous- for the sake of God’s mission to love, bless, and be reconciled to the whole world” (Rolf Jacobson, [WP](#)). So, whatever you have to give- in time, talents, and money- give it all with appreciative integrity- in thanks to God, give it with your whole self- 7 days a week!

Again, our lives throughout the week must be congruent with the way we worship on the Lord’s Day. “We are reminded in Psalm 50 that God is not pleased with mere external worship. The sacrifices we offer in the divine service do indeed matter, but not if they are not also followed by a life that brings God glory through obedience and love for him and for our neighbor” (McDermand). In this morning’s e-votional Father Richard Rohr speaks of a deep prayer life as teaching us to have an attitude of gratitude. While he says it in a different context, I do wonder if “only a pre-existent attitude of gratitude, a deliberate choice of love over fear, a desire to be positive instead of negative,” will allow us to genuinely give sacrifices of thanksgiving to God. He goes on to say, that the people who live with the most humility and gratitude are “deeply

convinced that they are drawing from another source; they are instruments. Their genius is not their own; it is borrowed. We are moons, not suns, except in our ability to pass on the light. Our life is not our own; yet, at some level, enlightened people know that their life has been given to them as a sacred trust. They know that 'love is repaid by love alone,' as both St. Francis of Assisi and St. Therese of Lisieux have said" ([link](#)).

I adopted a practice in officiating weddings some years ago when a former student of mine asked me to incorporate it into her wedding. She sent me a clip from his 1997 [speech](#) for a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Emmys. I had never seen it or if I had, I had forgotten. In his speech, Mr. Rogers, a Presbyterian minister, does something really unusual. He takes his limited time to talk, and he gives some back to the audience. He said, "So many people have helped me to come to this night. Some of you are here, some are far away, some are even in heaven. All of us have special ones who have loved us into being. Would you just take along with me ten seconds to think of the people who have helped you become who you are. Those who have cared about you and wanted what was best for you in life. Ten seconds of silence. I'll watch the time." (Pause for ten seconds). "Whomever you've been thinking about how pleased they must be to know the difference you feel they've made. They're the kind of people that television does well to offer our world." There wasn't a dry eye in the house. My former student asked for me to intentionally take the time to have she and her now spouse pause and to take in, to thank, to give God all the glory...for all of those

who had loved them into being. I didn't realize what a gift this was to everyone gathered as well. Why is it that we don't take the time to pause and to reflect and to give thanks...to truly say thank you?

You know we have to stop and to practice- to be disciplined-to be intentional- this is the sacrifice part- in being genuine in our giving sacrifices of thanksgiving to God and in paying our vows to the Most High. Whether it's through daily prayer, meditation, and/or adopting and maintaining a spiritual discipline or an attitude of gratitude, we must be intentional. Today is the last Sunday in the church calendar. I know, weird, huh?! Next Sunday we'll begin a new church year with Advent...a time of waiting for the coming of the Messiah. I wonder what it would look like to adopt a new practice or reinstate an old practice for this new church year?! It's an easy yet hard one to do consistently. Every day write down or pray to God aloud three things for which you're thankful, especially when life gets hard. Let's see if we can grow our attitudes for gratitude and thus grow in our faith and in our relationship with God. Rohr closed his devotional with these words, "In the end, it is not our own doing, or grace would not be grace. It is God's gift, not a reward for work well done. It is nothing for us to be boastful about. We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus. All we can do is be what God's Spirit makes us to be, and be thankful to God for the riches God has bestowed on us. Humility, gratitude, and loving service to others are probably the most appropriate responses we can make." Won't you join me in practicing daily gratitude this next church calendar year? Let us hold one another accountable as a community. For when we practice

gratitude our souls open to God's love for us and for all creation. We move from being the center of an insecure, fearful, self-absorbed world to seeing ourselves in inextricable communion with all life whose center and source is LOVE itself. Now thank we all our God! And thank you all for the honor and privilege of serving as one of your pastors here at Triune Mercy Center. Hallelujah and Amen!