

**Sermon: 18 November 2018 Joel 2:21-27, Matthew 6:25-33: An Attitude of Gratitude**

**HEBREW SCRIPTURE**

**Joel 2:21-27**

**UMH66**

**REFRAIN: AI – le – lu – ia! AI – le – lu – ia! Praise the everlasting King!**

<sup>21</sup> Do not fear, O soil;  
be glad and rejoice,

**for the LORD has done great things!**

<sup>22</sup> Do not fear, you animals of the field,

**for the pastures of the wilderness are green;**

the tree bears its fruit,

**the fig tree and vine give their full yield.**

<sup>23</sup> O children of Zion, be glad

**and rejoice in the LORD your God;**

for he has given the early rain for your vindication,

he has poured down for you abundant rain,

**the early and the later rain, as before.**

<sup>24</sup> The threshing floors shall be full of grain,

**the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.**

**REFRAIN: AI – le – lu – ia! AI – le – lu – ia! Widely yet God's mercy flows!**

<sup>25</sup> I will repay you for the years

that the swarming locust has eaten,

the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,

**my great army, which I sent against you.**

<sup>26</sup> You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,

and praise the name of the LORD your God,

**who has dealt wondrously with you.**

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

<sup>27</sup> You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,

**and that I, the LORD, am your God**

and there is no other.

**And my people shall never again be put to shame.**

**REFRAIN: AI – le – lu – ia! AI – le – lu – ia! Praise with us the God of grace!**

**\*THE GOSPEL**

**Matthew 6:25-33**

**NRSV**

**6** <sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

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As I was preparing for our message this morning, I went onto one of my favorite websites “textweek.com”. I’m glad I can tell you that this is one of my favorite websites, because textweek.com sounds respectable. Years ago, I started a sermon with, “As I was preparing for this sermon, I went onto one of my favorite websites “desperate preacher.com”. I sound somehow smarter now.

Anyway, as I was on textweek.com I found links with great sounding names. There was: Inclusive Language Seekers Liturgies from *Seekers Church*:

["Responding from the Heart" \(2003\)](#)

["Extravagant Gratitude" \(1999\)](#)

["Gather Us In" \(1998\)](#)

["Gratitude Begets Justice" \(1997\)](#)

I wanted very much to read what these writers had to say about gratitude, about thanksgiving. But every link I clicked on came back with the same message: “*An error has occurred. The requested page cannot be found.*”

Terrific! How was I supposed to learn about thanksgiving if I couldn’t read what anyone was talking about! How was I supposed to preach this morning! What was I going to say to you! Argh!

While I struggled through my fruitless clicking, I picked up my tea mug, looking forward to consoling myself with a nice hot sip. It had grown cold.

I picked up the phone to use our nifty intercom system to call Leslie and ask for another hot mug. I dialled handset one. That didn’t work. I was calling *from* handset one. I dialled number two. That didn’t work. I could hear that one ringing in the kitchen; Leslie was upstairs ironing clothes. I dialled number three. It rang four times. I guess it wasn’t near her ironing spot. She did, however, find it. She picked up...and got me another hot cup.

That hot cup of tea did the trick! My brain kicked in gear and I began to think about Gramercy Park – and I promise you, if you follow me all the way down this rabbit hole – I’ll make it worth your while.

Do any of you know Gramercy Park? It’s in downtown Manhattan bound by Park Avenue and Third and East 18<sup>th</sup> Street and East 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. The unique thing about Gramercy Park is that it is a gated locked park.

This 2-acre park – which means that it covers just under a mile is only open to the people residing around the park who pay an annual fee for which they are given a key. This makes Gramercy one of two unique parks in all of New York City that are privately owned.

This is what I learned about Gramercy Park from an article I read:

As a private park, Gramercy Park is held in common by the owners of the 39 surrounding structures, as it has been since December 31, 1831.<sup>[43]</sup> Two keys are allocated to each of the original lots surrounding the park, and the owners may buy keys for a fee, which was originally \$10 per key, but as of 2008 was

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\$350, with a \$1,000 fee for lost keys,<sup>[6][43][44]</sup> which rises to \$2,000 for a second instance.<sup>[30]</sup> The [Medeco](#) locks are changed annually,<sup>[31]</sup> and any property that does not pay the annual assessment of \$7,500 per lot has its key privileges revoked;<sup>[30]</sup> additionally, the keys are very hard to duplicate.<sup>[43]</sup> As of 2012, there were 383 keys in circulation, each individually numbered and coded.<sup>[30]</sup>

Can you imagine? Only 383 highly controlled keys to almost a mile of New York City, a city of 8.4 million residents! (US Census Bureau). Such lucky people to live around that park in such a prestigious area; right? The photos on Wikipedia all have captions like, “photographed through the private park’s fence.” Like peeping Toms the rest of New York peers through the iron bars to see how the lucky people live.

One of the photos captures the back of its famous statue of Edwin Booth – a great Shakespearean actor of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the unfortunate connection of also being the brother of John Wilkes Booth who assassinated President Lincoln.

In a New York Times article, the president of the Gramercy Park Block Association and its chief steward, Arlene Harrison, says she gets two or three requests a day to take pictures inside, “and the answer is always no.” “You say yes to just one, and it’s all over,” she said. Robert De Niro? Rejected. Woody Allen? Rejected. Only Gregory Peck was allowed to sneak in a camera for a documentary interview and that was because he lived on the park and had a key.

But *all* of that changed a few years ago when Shawn Christopher, a computer programmer and former Army sergeant from Pittsburgh, visited New York City on his honeymoon. He was staying at one of the hotels on the park, a hotel that happened to have one of the 383 coveted keys. He indicated that he was “unaware at the time that guests had to be accompanied by key holders on their visits and that commercial photography was prohibited.”

Evidently he didn’t ask Arlene Harrison whether he could take those three 360-degree panoramas using Photo Sphere, a Google app, which he then uploaded to Google Maps for the world to see. Said Mr. Christopher in the New York Times article, “He did not realize he needed permission, but he did not regret his decision to post the photos online. “I just really wanted to share this with other people,” he said. “It’s such a beautiful part of New York, and people shouldn’t miss out on that.”

So, what’s my point? I have two. And the first one is this, have you noticed how much I have fretted in this message this morning? The broken website links. The cold mug of tea. The inability to find the right intercom to get a hold of Leslie. The park to which only a few have access and a gatekeeper willing to say “no” two to three times a day. Why? What is she fretting about? Poor famous Shakespearean actor, Booth, whose name has been sullied by his brother’s

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atrocities. 8.4 million people who can't get in the park – but at least they can see it now.

And yet Jesus says, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”

But Jesus, what about my cold mug of tea?

It's amazing how insidious fretting and worrying can become in our days from what we have to accomplish...to what we read...to what we see on the news...to the conversations we have...to the injustices or hoarded privileges we see and experience.

And how much time and energy does my fretting and worrying take away from my life? From my witness? And from my gratitude, my thanksgiving? Giving “thanks with a grateful heart” is harder to do with a heart already full of fretting and worrying. And yet, when our rational mind really listens to Jesus, can we add a single hour to our lives by worrying? I know it was a rhetorical question he was asking us, but I think we're also supposed to come up with the answer, “No; worrying will NOT add even a single hour to my life.” Jesus said, “Do not worry.” Then he pointed out the simplest things to be thankful for: the flowers, the birds, the blade of grass.

So my first point ends in this question: *What are you fretting about or worrying about? Why not give all of that to God in prayer? Offer it up now...and then again 10 seconds from now...and then a minute from now...and then an hour from now. Giving things to God – and not taking them back – is a muscle to strengthen. It takes time.* And yet it is the exact thing that frees us up for life – the abundantly life which the Christ came to give us. (ref. John 10:10)

Worry takes hours away from our lives! But, do you know what *adds* hours, days, years to your life? Gratitude! Thanks-giving. That's what all the research is finding. *Thanks-giving adds actual time to our lives!*

Which leads me to my second point. Do you know why I've been picking on Gramercy Park this morning? It has to do with its *name*. Do you know what “Gramercy” means? It's an archaic Old English word from the French, “Grand merci” – or “big thanks”.

Are we really going to give the 383 key holders the corner on “Gramercy”, “Grand Merci”, “thanks-giving”? Or can we not just be *a little* thankful, but pile up the thanks and gratitude to God and to every agent who expresses the Divine Nature to us in our lives? What do you think? I'll start.

I give thanks for hot tea – and cold tea, for my ironed cloths, for Leslie's kindness to me every day. For a home with three phones with enough room that

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it takes four rings to find handset #3. For my warm office. For a good night's sleep.

For all of you here helping me worship this morning and making me a better worshipper simply by your combined presence. For the leaders spread out around the room. For those who are struggling among us who found their way here this morning. For all those who fought against the urge to turn over and go back to sleep.

For Missy who brought us into worship and read our scriptures this morning. For Rick and for the choir and the music we share in today. For Nancy and all her helpers who prepared this beautiful altar that inspires thanksgiving just by looking on it. For Mary Lou who prepared this bulletin that guides our worship this morning... and prepared the Thanksgiving letters...and the Charge Conference booklet...and all of the reports...and the Beacon... and...I think you get the picture! For Andy who vacuumed and cleans this sanctuary, sets up Dodd Hall for us, and cleaned the bathrooms. For all those who straighten up the pew contents to make sure that everything is in place for us to use each Sunday. For the greeters who greeted us and the ushers who ushered and our acolytes and our Bible bearer. For those who will lead us in prayer. For every worshiper here today!

For the Men's Club who will feed us a delicious turkey dinner following this service and for all of you who made the sides and desserts we'll sample. For the counters who so often forgo Fellowship Time to prepare the offering for deposit.

For this beautiful robe, stole and cross. For my call and my ordination. For this pulpit to speak from and a sound system that makes it easier for you to hear me. For these windows which inspire and these walls that hold the stories of 125 years of worship. For the presence of the Holy Spirit, the promises of God, and the saving Grace of Christ.

Today *this* is my Gramercy Park.

Worry gets in the way of our gratitude. But once I get going with gratitude, all that fretting and worrying starts to fall away. We have *so much* for which to be thankful!

So, today, I'm going to invite you to *worry less* – giving your worry and frets and anxiety over to God – and *thank more*, giving your gratitude to God for all with which you are blessed. Make your own Gramercy Park today!

And may its edge start here, but then extend to your home, and on to your places of work and recreation, and to all the places that you will go and to all the things that you will do. Until your Gramercy Park spreads far and wide for all to walk in. Until all of our Gramercy Parks combine to cover the whole world so that *all* may walk in the Grace that is witnessed in our extravagant thanks-giving.

Blessings on the journey. Amen.