



With Thanks

November 21, 2018

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On this Thanksgiving Eve, I give thanks to God for all the ministries in the Milwaukee Presbytery. From our chaplains to our Christian educators, and from worship leaders and pastors to Session members and deacons, and so many more, together you all make our regional ministry more complete. Thank you for serving God and the church so faithfully. From all the staff of the Milwaukee Presbytery, we wish you a blessed Thanksgiving holiday.



Now, I need to grouse for a bit. Our whole approach of giving thanks to God – counting our blessings – bugs me. Don't get me wrong: I'm generally a fan of gratitude. For those of you fortunate enough to hear

Diana Butler Bass speak at Immanuel Presbyterian Church about her new book, *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*, you'll remember how much good it does us to be grateful. It's better for our emotional disposition and our physical health. It's good for our community.

When I've received particularly good service, I'll often track down the employee's manager to let them know. Managers rarely get to hear nice things; more often, they receive complaints. Gratitude, when it builds up others, should be expressed liberally.

Instead, I struggle to give thanks to God for aspects of my life: the warmth of my home, my loving family, the bountiful food available to me, living in a country that offers me freedom of worship, peace and security, good health. Whenever I start to thank God for these "blessings," I can't help but think of the millions of people who lack, who shiver, who hunger, who fear, who suffer, and who worship in secret. Has God no blessing for them? As I thank God for my life, am I also accusing God of withholding either necessities or comfort from others?

At Presbyterian World Mission, I'd grimace to hear people recount the poverty or suffering seen on their mission trip and how they realized they were truly blessed in comparison. Has God blessed us intentionally, while depriving others? These are hard questions, and the mystery of God is too deep.

Where I've landed in this mystery is this: if in fact, my comfortable life is a gift from God, then I must be a good steward of that gift. As I celebrate my good health, I must take responsibility for those who are sick and have no access to medical care. If I am surrounded by family, I should seek out those who are lonely. If we have ample food, how do we best care for those who are hungry? If we live in a land of peace, how can we be peacemakers elsewhere?

This Thanksgiving season, I hope you will indeed count your blessings. It will help us map out just how much our continued ministry is needed.