



11.23.25 The Grateful Society | Colossians 3:15–17

Another story from Diana’s life — a moment when gratitude moved her beyond her own life and compelled her to touch her community.

She writes:

I woke early and I went alone into the city to join a protest.

I stood marveling at the buses pouring in. I joined a swelling river of humanity that looked like Tokyo at rush hour—packed, breathless, and full of energy.

I arranged to meet my clergywomen friends outside the National Museum of the American Indian. The crowd was already enormous. Worried they would never find me, I climbed onto one of the large boulders near the entrance so I could see and be seen.

One by one, my friends spotted me and made their way through the mass of people. Teary eyed, we hugged, this was a special day.

They passed out signs—black placards with white letters displaying the Beatitudes: *Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who mourn.*

My friends had added new ones: *Blessed are the women. Blessed are the immigrants. Blessed are the uninsured.*

We stood on the rocks, holding blessings above the sea of humanity from all walks of life. People passing below shouted back: “I’m mourning—a lot!” “Blessed are the immigrants!” “Look—the church is here!”

Strangers reached toward us with gratitude, prayer requests, tears. In that moment, I felt what Jesus meant on that Galilean hillside when he shared the Sermon on the Mount: blessing the disregarded, touching the hurting, announcing a new community of love to the “least of these”.

Surrounded by thousands, I cried because of hope, because we were touching one another with blessing. It had been a long time since I had felt this grateful.

Bass’s gratitude moved her outward — beyond feeling grateful to *being* a blessing.

Tom Schuman put it beautifully: **“May we not keep our blessings, but give them away.”**

That’s the essential work gratitude calls us to do: not to hoard blessings but to let them overflow, trusting there will be more blessings tomorrow — touching others, shaping communities, and transforming the world around us.

We are blessed to be a blessing.

Gratitude begins with “me,” but it cannot end there. True gratitude always becomes “we.” We can trust there will be enough.

Speaking of having enough. I know some of you are already thinking about our Pie Social. We are dreaming about pie, hoping we get a good piece.

I get it. I’ve been thinking about pie since the first Sunday of November.

To make our waiting just a little more unbearable, these pies are waiting for us: Strawberry Rhubarb, Apple, Peach, Pecan, Chocolate Cream Cheese Pudding, Banana Cream, Cherry and Apple Almond Cranberry! Yes!

And I have been agonizing over what kind of pie to bring. Something unique, tasty. What should I bring?

Here is the pie I am bringing!

A gratitude pie! ...chart,

Well, just a pie chart.

Groan, I know that's a little lame.

Yes, I know it is not as tasty as say a “**chocolate cream cheese pudding pie**” in a graham cracker crust. But mine has zero calories - and you can get seconds guilt-free!?

Moving on.

Bass gives us a way to see gratitude as a whole. She is serving up a gratitude pie that has *at least four* basic components:

- **Emotions** – the personal “me” response of awe, joy, appreciation
- **Ethics** – the actions we take in response to gifts received

And these play out in two arenas:

Wait two seconds...and got to next slide.

- **Personal (me)**
- **Public (we)**

However, you slice this pie (see what I did there?) gratitude has **four parts**, making a whole, working in harmony.

Some of us more easily gravitate to one slice more than others.

If you emphasize **me + emotions**, you feel deep appreciation when someone helps you. Gratitude looks like joy, delight, or surprise.

If you emphasize **me + ethics**, you express gratitude through action – writing thank-you notes, returning favors, doing the right thing.

If you emphasize **we + emotions**, gratitude wells up when you're with others – singing the anthem, cheering a team (go Vikings!), worshipping together, gathering at the table.

If you emphasize **we + ethics**, gratitude looks like public responsibility – volunteering, giving, serving, building a better world.

Which slice do you resonate with most?

Before reading Bass, I mostly feasted on that first slice: the inner, emotional “me” response. Maybe you did too.

But this chart widens our vision. It stretches us. And honestly — it is far more biblical. Gratitude is meant to ripple outward into community, justice, compassion, and action.

In this part of her book, Grateful, Bass incorporated the Sermon on the Mount, a key teaching by Jesus explaining what God’s Kingdom is to look like on this earth.

She was struck by a surprising truth: blessings and gratitude are intimately connected.

Few of us are naturally thankful for the things that appear to curse us. We easily give thanks for friends, health, provision, and love. Those seem like obvious blessings.

We say, “I’m blessed,” and we typically mean that life is going well.

But what are blessings, really?

The English word *blessing* comes from a root meaning *gift from God*, something *hallowed* or *made holy*. Over time, it became associated with *bliss*—with happiness, merriment, favor.

Blessing came to be used in two ways: as a sacred gift and as something that makes us happy. And because gifts and gratitude always go together, we have come to expect blessings to feel good.

But then we come to Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount. And suddenly our assumptions fall apart.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Most of us sitting here would never call these conditions blessings.

In fact, we'd say the opposite is true. "Blessed are the rich for they own the best things." "Blessed are the glamorous, the powerful, the successful. Blessed are those who get everything they want."

And maybe we have forgotten the meaning of the word "blessed". It's more like we have reduced blessing to material comfort and consumer goods.

But the Greek word Jesus uses is "Makarios", which means both *happiness* and *favor*. Some translations render it "happy," as in, "Happy are the poor."

But that can give the wrong impression — almost as if Jesus is telling starving or grieving people to *smile about it*. That's not just strange; it can make Christians seem emotionally disconnected from real suffering.

The deeper meaning is found in the idea of *favor*. Makarios means *God's favor, God's abundant grace* poured out in unexpected places.

So, Jesus is not saying, "Be happy you're poor." Instead, it can be read: **"Favored are the poor. God privileges the poor. God and God's gifts are with them."**

This would have shocked Jesus' hearers. In the ancient world, blessing was the domain of the elite. The word *blessed* was sometimes interchangeable with *the gods* themselves—those who lived above the struggles of ordinary people.

The poor carried shame; the rich carried glory. The emperor was considered uniquely blessed, and blessings were thought to flow downward to him and from him to everyone else.

But when Jesus stood on that hillside and said, **"Blessed are the poor,"** He overturned the entire politics of blessing.

He declared that God's gifts are distributed not from the top down, but from the bottom up. God's abundance begins with the vulnerable, the overlooked, the ones society calls "least."

And what is the proper response to a gift? **Gratitude.**

We often get another thing wrong about blessings: we think they are individual. “My blessings.” A private list of things going right for “me”.

But in this sermon about blessings, Jesus addressed a **crowd**. Of the nine Beatitudes, only two are individual. The rest are plural, about the “we”. Jesus was forming not blessed individuals but a **blessed community**.

Imagine that hillside. A crowd of ordinary people—poor fishermen, grieving mothers, hungry children, the tired...all gathered together.

And Jesus says to *them*, “**Blessed are you. God is with you. God is for you. God’s gifts are already at work among you.**”

The blessing was not about wealth or ease. It was about God creating a new kind of society.

One marked by righteousness, peacemaking, and justice. A community capable of gratitude even in hardship because God’s presence is their true abundance.

At the end of the sermon, Matthew writes: “**When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching.**” And I believe it.

Bass believed they were probably also grateful. For a blessed community is a grateful community.

They arrived as a crowd of individuals, each carrying their own struggles. But through the blessing of Jesus’ words, they were invited to become something more: a people whose gratitude arises not from possessions or status, but from God’s favor shared among them.

And today, we may have arrived as a bit of a crowd of individuals, each carrying our own struggles.

But through the blessing of Jesus’ words today and through the blessings of Bass’s words all month long, we have been invited to become something more.

A grateful society. A people of God, whose gratitude arises not from our materials possessions but from God's favor shared amongst us.

And one way we celebrated God's favor amongst us, was by our Cornucopia of Thanksgiving. We took it down for the Celebration of Life service yesterday.

Each week in November we have been adding our thanks. As we close, this is what you are thankful for, part of what makes us a "Grateful Society":

Lord, we thank you for...

- my church family
- supportive co-workers
- love and friendship
- my children and grandchildren
- Growing up in a Christian family
- Good health, ability at 75 to be able to help seniors with heavy jobs
- Every day I am here
- My puppy
- Good health
- All the "prayer warriors"
- Having a job
- God's love and grace

Too many to list. I am grateful to all of you who participated and shared your thanksgiving and gratitude!

May we continue to be grateful here at BUMC, may we continue to be a community and a church family—blessed to be a blessing...blessing others thru our Red Wagon/Food shelf efforts, bound together by the abundant grace of God. **Amen.**

In our **time of reflection**, take a moment to breathe and quiet your mind. Think about this question:

Which slice of the gratitude pie—personal or public, emotional or ethical—do I most need to grow in?

Or said another way, how might God be calling me to let my blessings overflow into the lives of others?