

## November Theme

### ***Gratitude: The Practice of Reverence***

John Milton wrote: "Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience the world."

In order to make sense of this statement it may be helpful to know the root meaning of these words.

Reverence has its origins in several languages. From the old French it means "awe, respect, to be wary of." The root word "ver" or "wer" means to become aware of.

Gratitude comes from the Latin "gratus", meaning thankful, pleasing, thankfulness. Also from the Latin "gratia" which means favor, esteem, regard, pleasing quality, or goodwill. "Gratus" is related to the modern word "grace" and is the short prayer said before a meal which expresses thanks for the food before us.

#### **Thoughts/questions for discussion and discernment on your own, around the table, or with each other**

What sets the stage for helping you experience gratitude? Are there people, places, or situations that promote and/or elicit gratitude? What gets in the way of experiencing gratitude? Do moments of gratitude instill in you a feeling of reverence towards that for which you are grateful? Or does reverence in this context imply too much of a separation between you and that for which you are grateful? Does revering, or being in awe of something, necessarily create gratitude?

Can gratitude be taught or is it innate? Should one be grateful for certain things? What does real gratitude look like?

Does gratitude bring forth reverence or does reverence bring forth gratitude? How does one express reverence or irreverence? Do you agree that a contemporary meaning of irreverence implies humor and a lightness of thought?

For our younger members:

For what are you thankful? What are some of the ways that you can show you are thankful?

## Resources for November questions

Hymnal Reading 439

We Gather in Reverence

We gather in reverence before the wonder of life-

*The wonder of this moment*

The wonder of being together, so close yet so apart-

*Each hidden in our own secret chamber,*

Each listening, each trying to speak-

*Yet none fully understanding, none fully understood.*

We gather in reverence before all tangible things-

That eyes see not, nor ears can detect-

*That hands can never touch,*

*that space cannot hold,*

*and time cannot measure.*

Sophia Lyon Fahs

## As If to Demonstrate an Eclipse

I pick an orange from a wicker basket  
and place it on the table  
to represent the sun.  
Then down at the other end  
a blue and white marble  
becomes the earth  
and nearby I lay the little moon of an aspirin.

I get a glass from a cabinet,  
open a bottle of wine,  
then I sit in a ladder-back chair,  
a benevolent god presiding  
over a miniature creation myth,

and I begin to sing  
a homemade canticle of thanks  
for this perfect little arrangement,  
for not making the earth too hot or cold  
not making it spin too fast or slow

so that the grove of orange trees  
and the owl become possible,  
not to mention the rolling wave,  
the play of clouds, geese in flight,  
and the Z of lightning on a dark lake.

Then I fill my glass again  
and give thanks for the trout,  
the oak, and the yellow feather,

singing the room full of shadows,  
as sun and earth and moon  
circle one another in their impeccable orbits  
and I get more and more cockeyed with gratitude.

Billy Collins  
Nine Horses

From A New Earth by Eckhart Tolle (page 235)

Many poets and sages throughout the ages have observed that true happiness--- I call it the joy of Being---is found in simple, seemingly unremarkable things. Most people, in their restless search for something significant to happen to them, continuously miss the insignificant, which may not be insignificant at all. The philosopher Nietzsche, in a rare moment of deep stillness, wrote, "For happiness, how little suffices for happiness!...the least thing precisely, the gentlest thing, the lightest thing, a lizard's rustling, a breath, a wisk, an eye glance---little maketh up the best happiness. Be still."

From Hafiz

Even after all this time,  
The sun never says to the earth,  
"You owe me."  
Look what happens with  
A love like that.  
It lights up the whole sky.

From Daisies by Mary Oliver

"It is heaven itself to take what is given, to see what is plain, what the sun lights up willingly. We offer gratitude and reverence to the things that sustain us...the earth, our community, the mysteries of the Universe, our good fortune in the miracle of life."

## Aimless Love

This morning as I walked along the lakeshore,  
I fell in love with a wren  
and later in the day with a mouse  
the cat had dropped under the dining room table.

In the shadows of an autumn evening,  
I fell for a seamstress  
still at her machine in the tailor's window,  
and later for a bowl of broth,  
steam rising like smoke from a naval battle.

This is the best kind of love, I thought,  
without recompense, without gifts,  
or unkind words, without suspicion,  
or silence on the telephone.

The love of the chestnut,  
the jazz cap and one hand on the wheel.

No lust, no slam of the door---  
the love of the miniature orange tree,  
the clean white shirt, the hot evening shower,  
the highway that cuts across Florida.

No waiting, no huffiness, or rancor---  
just a twinge every now and then

for the wren who had built her nest  
on a low branch overhanging the water  
and for the dead mouse,  
still dressed in its light brown suit.

But my heart is always propped up  
in a field on its tripod,  
ready for the next arrow.

After I carried the mouse by the tail  
to a pile of leaves in the woods,  
I found myself standing at the bathroom sink  
gazing down affectionately at the soap,

so patient and soluble,  
so at home in its pale green soap dish.  
I could feel myself falling again  
as I felt its turning in my wet hands  
and caught the scent of lavender and stone.

Billy Collins  
Nine Horses