



**“GRATITUDE CHECK”**  
**SCRIPTURE: PSALM 111; LUKE 17: 11-19**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**October 13, 2019**  
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

**Psalm 111**

111:1 Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

111:2 Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.

111:3 Full of honor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever.

111:4 He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds; the LORD is gracious and merciful.

111:5 He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant.

111:6 He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the heritage of the nations.

111:7 The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.

111:8 They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

111:9 He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name.

111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

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**Luke 17:11-19**

17:11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

17:12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance,

17:13 they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

17:14 When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean.

17:15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

17:16 He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

17:17 Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?"

17:18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

17:19 Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

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(set out table setting)

When you set a table, there's a right way and a wrong way to do it—that's the way I was raised. Fork on the left next to the plate, napkin on the outside of the fork, knife and spoon on the right. Utensils placed in the order of usage, about one inch from the corner of the table.

Even a casual summertime supper, there are members of my extended family—who shall remain nameless, who feel it is important to correct any lapses in propriety. It's so important that they will even go behind anyone who hastily set the table and correct, let's say, an errant knife with the blade not turned toward the plate. That's a true story—that happened in 2019.

Oh and always say please. And always say thank you.

What's at stake in the manners we're expected to bring to the table? I always believed it was about making other people comfortable and about being respectful, especially to our host.

I considered all of these table manners just basic, universal, maybe even natural law.

But as I stretched out into a bigger world, I realized these things were not natural law. You know they hold forks differently in France? We lived there when I was 5, so that was the first crack in the armor. But, at the time I could chalk that up as an interesting quirk of French culture.

Smacking when you eat is good manners in some cultures. Not in mine. Smacking was a sure way to get shamed in my family—mostly by my younger sister who seemed to become the table manner police at my family's table almost immediately after she learned how to talk. "Stop smacking, stop clicking your fork on your teeth."

Imagine my joy when I watch my son receive the same loving direction from his younger sister at our table. (UGH!)

I was in my forties when something finally broke open for me about table manners—and I began to wake up to the way power is stitched into how manners are deployed. I was home with three of my godson's sons—they were all little—the oldest may have been 6. One of them asked for a drink. And I said, "Can you say, please?"

The oldest of the boys said, "My grandma says we don't have to say please to white people."

And something in my heart broke. I realized his other grandmother was teaching him how to protect himself from people like me. It was a horrible feeling really—sadness mixed with indignation—she obviously didn't know me very well, she obviously didn't understand good manners.

My godson spoke up. "I told the boys they need to say please to you. I told their grandma not to teach them that."

Chris, my godson, went on to explain why their other grandmother doesn't want them to say please to white people. They shouldn't have to beg or kiss up or try to act white to get what they need in life.

That made a lot of sense to me. And just like that. I had a whole different relationship to the manners I had learned. White supremacy culture is all about white ways being concealed as simply the right ways. And when we sleep on the power that is tangled up in simple things like manners, we sleep on the way Jesus is calling us to be healed.

Now don't misunderstand me—I am not saying please and thank you are bad, I am saying they are not innocent, they are not empty of power, they are not empty of moral content—it matters who is talking, it matters who is being talked to, it matters what we think is at stake in the way we come to the table and the ways we comport ourselves at the table.

If we are truly following Jesus, then we must be willing to engage in a power analysis of how we do things, why we do things the way we do things, and who is impacted and how they are impacted by the ways we do things.

(Go to the Communion Table)

This Table has its own set of expectations, right?

We are invited here by Jesus. We are invited here by God. So the way we come to the Table and the way we comport ourselves at Table matters.

And if Eucharist is a way of life, then a power analysis of this Table is, by extension, a power analysis of our way of life.

What is it that Jesus wants from us when we come here? It is his power that we must begin with in our power analysis.

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Luke's Gospel doesn't need to get the geography exactly right—suffice it to say, Jesus was in an area where running into a Samaritan would be possible—but the area was one where Samaritans were foreigners. First step in the power analysis—understand the social position of all the people who are interacting. Samaritans and Jews were known for the tension that existed between them.

They had a different understanding of sacred geography and different interpretations of scripture. There was a deep divide between these cultures. Propriety dictated that Jews and Samaritans didn't really associate with one another. So, Jesus would have been expected to shun Samaritans if he wanted to comport himself properly.

Social convention and Jewish Levitical laws dictated that anyone with leprosy or other skin maladies had to live outside the camp. When approached they were supposed to yell out, "Unclean, unclean" so no one would accidentally come near them.

There are verses and verses in Leviticus about the process a person had to go through to be deemed clean by a priest in order to come back into life in the camp. We went through it all in Bible study on Wednesday—so many steps, so many demands, so many phases of scrutiny and stigmatizing actions like having to shave off every bit of body hair, including eye brows. Power analysis must include excavating cultural norms and who gets to deploy them and what power they have to dictate social position, social capital, and social acceptability.

Instead of requiring days and days of these steps and practices, Jesus healed these people who had been cast outside their community with a simple directive—and

they were made clean. Jesus opened the door for them to come back in—when the process they would have had to follow was arduous, expensive, and stigmatizing.

Jesus has the power to override social convention. Jesus has the power to heal bodies and restore broken relationships. Only one person recognized where that kind of power has to come from—only one person recognized that they had just had a brush with God.

Only one embodied gratitude—and he was the one who was the furthest outside the confines of social acceptability—not only leprous, but a Samaritan. Which meant he was an unwelcomed foreigner—his ways were seen as wrong. Jesus uses his power to heal many layers of brokenness.

And while we in the dominant culture are prone to always identify with the positive characters in biblical narratives, a true power analysis of ourselves means we need to make room for the what ifs.

What if we are the nine who didn't come back to say thank you?

What if we're not thankful for the ways Jesus is trying to heal us right now? What if we'd rather fit in to social convention instead of gratefully receive what Jesus is dishing out to us?

Our journey as a white faith community in America right now is to listen and to learn, to dig deep into the ways we have been shaped by white supremacy culture, to trust where Jesus invites us to go with the truth that he promises will set us all free.

Jesus does not invite us as individuals to the Table—he invites us as a community—and when only some of us come grateful, it diminishes the level of healing our community can experience.

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Franklin Graham is in Asheville today for the last NC stop on his “Decision America 2020 tour.”

He is a child of God—and there is a place for him at this Table.

But are we ready for this Table to be what Jesus showed us it should be—a place where the family of faith has difficult conversations—where we hold each other accountable to the Gospel, where we are empowered to speak and to receive hard truth.

Franklin Graham has betrayed the faith that he claims to teach—he has deployed the sacred texts of Christianity and the holy name of Jesus to sow seeds of shame

and hatred. He is cozied up to a President who is capitalizing on the deep wounds of white supremacy and white nationalism and xenophobia and transphobia and homophobia for his own political gain. Franklin Graham is appropriating Jesus to encourage soul killing and life threatening practices like conversion therapy. He is amplifying rhetoric about this nation sinking into a civil war if impeachment proceedings continue.

And what are we doing as people to faith to disrupt the ways Jesus and Judeo-Christian scriptures are being used for such destructive purposes by Mr. Graham and others?

This is not a Table where the priority is making people comfortable, or even being nice. This Table is about transformation. And Jesus is the one with the power to transform us.

Jesus didn't tell Judas to stay away from the Table. He told him to come to the Table. And with Judas at the Table Jesus told him the truth of his betrayal. Jesus told Peter the truth of his betrayal at the Table.

At this Table betrayers are held accountable by being called in closer—Judas on Jesus' left hand, Peter on Jesus' right. At this Table those who feel the furthest away from Jesus are brought the closest to Jesus. He humbles the arrogant. He ennoblees the demeaned. He sees right through us—and we are exposed down to the rawest places of our fears, our distortions, our cowardice, and our brokenness.

At this Table those who have hoarded and taken too much for themselves are taught what enough really is.

At this Table those who have been deprived of what they need are taught what abundance really is.

This Table is for everyone who trusts Jesus enough to take what it is that he dishes out.

And that includes us. We are called to hold our siblings in Christ accountable to the Gospel; and we are called to be grateful when we are held accountable to the Gospel as well.

Because Jesus doesn't just invite us to find the courage to hold the Franklin Grahams of the world accountable to the Gospel. Jesus invites us to be held accountable to the Gospel, too.

And the truth is we struggle to be grateful for the ways Jesus is holding us accountable at this Table. We are being held accountable for things like white supremacy and consumption and the power of social convention to prop up systems of systemic oppression and disadvantage, things like our level of distraction and

bias and self-hatred. Things like our perceived fragility and our patterns of avoidance and denial.

Progressive Christians have helped to create the conditions that have trivialized the power of this Table. We've white washed it. We've overlaid it with social convention and propriety. We tried to conceal its edginess, its prophetic voice, its power to change us, its power to heal us.

We've made it instead a place where we often risk nothing for our faith. We can come here again and again without much at stake at all. Our faith journey can become trivialized. We can lapse into privileging our comfort over Jesus' offer to heal us.

Our Eucharistic power analysis brings us to a moment of truth—a gratitude check.

Are you grateful for the hard work God is calling our community to do? Or are you avoiding it, defending yourself against it, finding ways to deny that you, too, are called to come closer to Jesus?

Are we grateful for the chance to be called out and called in on how we are carriers of cultures and norms that harm people, that prop up systems that oppress people?

What is standing in our way of being grateful for the gift of a God who loves us enough to tell us the truth?

This is a Table about trusting Jesus to give us the food that we truly need.

Gratitude is a way of life—and gratitude at the Eucharist Table isn't just about being thankful for a beautiful moment of Table fellowship, it's about being thankful for the power of Jesus to save us from ourselves.

Thanks be to God.