

THANKSGIVING EVE SERVICE

Nov. 24, 2021

Revs. Richard Maraj and Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Maraj: Monday morning I was at breakfast with a friend, and he gave me some "dad" Thanksgiving jokes. Or I'm not quite sure ... he might have said "bad" Thanksgiving jokes. **[Congregation laughs]** So I'll let you decide!

What did the turkey say to the hunter on Thanksgiving Day?

"Quack, quack, quack, quack." **[Rev. Maraj and congregation laugh]**

Bad? Or not bad? Okay, not bad. Okay; how about this one?

What do you call the ghost of a turkey?

A poultry-geist. **[Congregation moans and laughs]**

What do you call a turkey the day after Thanksgiving? What do you call a turkey the day after Thanksgiving?

Lucky! **[Congregation laughs and moans]** Okay!

And you're lucky, because I'm only telling you three, and I actually had 10 ready to share with you! **[Congregation laughs]**

So life is always changing. And, from the time we were born, we're changing. Our bodies change; our attitudes change; our values change; our beliefs change. You know, relationships change. Our careers change. I mean, so many things are always constantly changing in our lives.

And the fact is: change sometimes makes us feel awkward and uncomfortable. Life feels uncertain and unstable, and sometimes even scary. Life is a constant rolling of ebbs and flows and highs and lows, and it often isn't easy, and isn't often fun.

You know, Jesus said, *"In this life, there will be trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer: for I have overcome the world."* And one of the best ways to be of good cheer -- one of the best ways to overcome the trials, the changes and challenges of life -- is with a grateful mind. And a grateful heart. And a joyful spirit.

We may not be able to control every single thing that happens in our lives, but we can control how we see, how we react, how we handle, and how we show up in those situations.

You know, I don't think anything has caused more change in our lives -- individually and collectively -- over the last couple of years as the impact of Covid. In fact, it's still impacting us today; Rev. Lori isn't here, because she has Covid. **[Congregation murmurs]** And it impacted us in the sense that we all had to go get tested yesterday to see if we could even do service today. So it's still impacting us.

And it has a tremendous impact on people. People have not just gotten sick, but lost their lives. It's devastated families. Some people can't be together with loved ones in the hospital. Some have not been able to celebrate their memorials -- their celebration of life -- because of this situation. There are conflicts about masks and vaccines, and debates and all kinds of energies always going. It's changed how we travel, socialize, and even how we do church has been impacted.

And so the question is: How grateful have you felt -- and are feeling -- with this change and all the changes of life? And sometimes we don't feel like we have the power, but we do have the ability to be grateful, to be appreciative, to continue to see the good in these situations. Because even in the trials -- even in the changes and challenges -- gratitude gives us the option to get better instead of being bitter. To accept and enjoy, rather than resist and resent the things that are going on.

I would suggest that change is something that's always calling us higher, and calling us to open our hearts to a greater level of appreciation and acceptance and enjoyment of them.

I'll tell you: even with Covid, I think there have been blessings and gifts. Like, I'll tell you some of the ones for me in this Covid experience. I think the isolation has really helped me have a little time of extra self-introspection and self-reflection. I think that's a really good thing. I think it also taught me that my life doesn't have to be as busy to be enjoyable. I mean, sometimes you can have a good life just being simple.

It made me appreciate Amazon even more. **[Congregation laughs]** It's amazing! I mean, you just click a thing on your phone, and it's right at your door! I mean, from chorine tablets to bed sheets, from gazebos to boxer shorts **[congregation laughs]**, I have gotten it all! I mean, I'm not kidding! It sounds ridiculous, but I've really appreciated that!

Also the blessings of technology. Because we've had to get creative in how we live and connect and interact, and keep functioning in our business. And I'll tell you, Zoom -- or whatever platforms have it -- where you have meetings; I've had doctor's appointments. And we've had all kinds of ... we've taught classes. We've done all kinds of stuff!

We've had to be creative with church! You know, we had to record in this empty Sanctuary. And one thing I noticed is that: when I told jokes in the empty Sanctuary, the full Sanctuary I got about the same amount of laughter. And so it's ... **[Congregation laughs]**

Something else I discovered was a whole bunch of new TV shows I would have never watched; I ended up binge watching through it.

And the other one: I think I've gotten tougher. Because if you would have asked to put a Q-tip up my nose a year ago ... **[Congregation laughs]** I would have been crying. And actually, my nose was watering on the first one. But yesterday I rocked! **[Congregation laughs]** I was so calm; it didn't bother me. I almost wanted to say, "Hey, you can go a little higher if you want!" **[Congregation laughs]** But I didn't want to appear cocky, so I didn't want to do that. **[Congregation laughs]**

The other thing about it is that, sometimes when you lose something -- and you're no longer able to do something -- and you get to do it again, there's an even greater appreciation and joy for those things.

All our lives have changed. But the great thing "to be of good cheer" is to have a grateful mind. To be as grateful and thankful and appreciative for the people, for the things we get to do, and even for the changes ... because they really do bring out the best in ourselves. It forces us to rise up and be more creative, and to be more thankful.

So now Richard's going to share some of his gratitudes, and then we're going to give you an opporutnity to do the same, as well.

Rev. Richard Rogers: You know, when you shared with me that we were going to talk about change, each of us has experienced so much change in the last year that I really had to take a step back and really look at: so what am I really grateful for?

You know, I think there's three ways to deal with change. For me, the first way is that part of us that is kind of a "high A" personality that is trying to make change happen: trying to drive, trying to make life happen, go after it, get it done. And that's kind of where I spent most of my life, I think. That drive; that trying to encourage change and demand change and work toward change.

And the second place is kind of almost the opposite of that. It's when we resist change. It's when we fear change; when we're not sure we can trust change.

And then there's this middle ground that I think is maybe the most spiritual aspect of that. It is where you just trust it. You trust the change in your life. You trust that God is at work in every experience for your highest good.

You know, I've shared a couple of times in my past about an experience I had when I was in YOU -- when I was in the teenage ministry of a little Unity church in Santa Ana, California. And our YOU sponsor said, "For three weeks, your affirmation -- your thought -- is thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."

And for three weeks, that is your dominant thought. So if it's a red light: thank you, God. If it's a green light: thank you, God. If it's cold cereal for breakfast or a big buffet, your only thought is thank you, God."

And I thought it was the dumbest exercise that I could ever ... **[Congregation laughs]** Like, there's no way I'm going to be grateful for dumb stuff. Nobody does that! **[Congregation laughs]** Right?

And I really engaged it. I did it over and over again: thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God. And at the end of that three weeks, I really had an experience for maybe the first time in my life, at 16, of letting go of control. And really realizing that every moment, as I give thanks -- no matter what's going on. Whether I asked for it or didn't ask for it, I could give thanks for it ... there was a blessing there that I hadn't always acknowledged.

You know, in Unity we talk about divine order. And divine order is this concept that everything in your life is flowing from God, through God, through each and every one of us. And that divine order is the perfection of God expressing in your life in the right way and the right time.

And I really believe that when we can trust that -- when we have the faith to realize that our life is flowing, that we don't have to drive toward an outcome using our will or our personality -- that we can really allow life to flow. And that there's a greater level of good for each and every one of us. That we don't have to push it, but we also don't have to resist it. That there is what Ghandhi called this middle ground. And when we stay in the middle ground, we allow life to flow.

And this last year -- the last two years -- I've had an opportunity to really practice just staying in the flow. Don't push to the right; don't push to the left. Just stay in the flow. And when I could stay in the flow -- when I could give thanks over and over for things that I thought were good and for things that I really questioned could ever be good -- I realized that, even in this time, I really have been profoundly blessed. And there's been change and there's been difficulty and heartache sometimes. And, yet, as we give thanks, we feel that divine activity of Spirit lifting us, guiding us, directing us.

So together would you say with me: *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."*

Together: **[with congregation]** *"Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God."*

Amen.

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