

# So Many Blessings...

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Prayer Practitioner Sherri Dotter, RScP and Chris Johnson, RScP.



A Beloved Community  
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

## Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

### Opening Prayer – Sherri

### Introduction – Rev. Diana

Good morning. For those who might be new to us today, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center. Thank you for joining us this morning. Welcome Home to our Beloved Community, and welcome Home to your own Mystic Heart.

Let's begin with some devotional chanting...*Let Love Be the Guide.*

### Chant – *Let Love Be the Guide*

#### Rev. Diana

As we chant together, we synchronize our vibration...we create a shift in our consciousness, both personally and globally. Chanting is another way to experience the sacred, to praise and give thanks.

This month we are taking time to *Celebrate the Gift*...the gift of Life, the gift of Love, the gift of Abundance, the gift of Community...there are *So Many Blessings* to celebrate.

As we sit, still at peace, feeling our connection, we take a deep, cleansing breath...and relaxing the body on the outbreath, let yourself be fully supported, allowing your eyes to gently close...slowing the breath and allowing it to find its own pace and sense of flow...scanning the body and releasing any remaining tension...letting go of anything that has come before this moment...breathing in Peace and allowing Peace to flow from you into the space around you. Peace within...Peace without...surrendered to the stillness of this moment.

And we extend that Peace into the Global Community... knowing that we are intimately connected...of the same Spirit...

Ground in Blessed Peace, we envision a web of Conscious Awareness that encompasses the earth...We see it with the inner eye, and we feel its Presence. Each of us is one radiant point of Light in the web, perfectly and intelligently made. Sensing the Divinity of every human, we expand our Vision to include every creature that shares this beautiful planet with us, and we sense the Light in each one. Now expand the Vision to include everything else...the plants and rocks, the sand, the soil, and the water all shining with the Light of Spirit...teeming with Life and

Intelligence. We allow our Vision to move into the heavens, and we realize that the clouds, the stars, and the galaxies are all radiating the same Divine Light...all part of One Eternal and Omnipresent Life.

Feeling our Connection, we share a heartfelt intention for our time together. We claim the Light that we are and commit to living as the hands, feet, hearts, and voices of God in this world.

In setting this prayerful intention, our Work here is empowered. We are investing our Life Energy in Peace, Love, Compassion, Abundance, and Freedom. In the silence, we feel the Power of our collective consciousness...and Wholeness is being revealed.

## **SILENCE – 1 Minute – Bell**

### **Rev. Diana**

In September 1620, a group of over one hundred English men and women set sail for the New World aboard the Mayflower. Two months later, the three-masted merchant ship landed on the shores of Cape Cod, on Wampanoag land, in present-day Massachusetts.

In late December, the Mayflower anchored at Plymouth Rock, where the pilgrims formed the first permanent settlement of Europeans in New England. More than half of the original settlers died during the first winter, but the survivors were eventually able to secure peace treaties with neighboring Native American tribes.

The holiday that we have come to know as Thanksgiving was originally a blending of two holidays...a celebration of the harvest, customary to the English, and a religious celebration customary to the Puritans. While there is record of thanks being offered to God during the Harvest, for the aid of the Native Tribes without whom the settlers would have starved, and for the abundance of food going into winter, Thanksgiving was not considered a religious holiday.

Historically, we don't know exactly how the first Thanksgiving played out...there is little record. What we do know is that the Plymouth settlers would likely not have survived without the assistance of the Indigenous People. So this morning, we take a moment of gratitude for the thoughtfulness and caring of the Indigenous people, for their knowledge, wisdom, and humanity...for their willingness to help those in need...even when the two cultures were so different from one another...even though these strange English had moved onto their land without invitation. Their generosity and kindness have made it possible for us to be here today. We are so grateful. I would like to take a moment to share a Wampanoag Thanksgiving prayer:

I thank you for Grandmother Moon, I thank you for Grandfather Sun.

I thank you for the four directions: the east, the south, the west, the north.

I thank you for all my relations: the winged nation, creeping and crawling nation, the four-legged nation, the green and growing nation, and all things living in the water.

Honoring the clans: the deer, the bear, the wolf, the turtle, the snipe.

Great Spirit, I thank you today.                      A'Ho. Thank You.

The Perennial Wisdom, that thread of Truth that runs through all spiritual traditions, would tell us that this prayer offered to Great Spirit is a recognition and celebration of our Oneness, a prayer of gratitude for all that is.

And so we are blessed to have this holiday to remember and acknowledge our gifts...to give thanks for the abundance that we experience in this country...and to remember where the many blessings in our lives come from...from Great Spirit, the All-That-Is, the Infinite Field of Possibility, God.

### **SILENCE – 1 Minute – Bell**

#### **Rev. Diana**

Each of us has *So Many Blessings* in our lives. Life Itself is Gift...it is Given. Br. David Steindl-Rast says that “the only appropriate response is gratefulness.” But so often we forget...at least I do. What is it that gets in the way of our remembering to feel grateful, and to offer Thanks, for the countless blessings in our lives? I'd like to tell you a story.

Once upon a time, there was a bird. He was a water bird...a duck. Living on the water, depending on the water for its livelihood, was part of its nature. The duck spent most of its time on the water. He really liked it when the water was calm, still...he liked looking at his reflection in the water. But more often than not, the water was not completely still...the wind and other forces caused ripples in the water. The duck was not so fond of the ripples...his reflection became distorted when the water lost its calm.

One day, a huge storm came up over the lake. The wind began to blow, and the rain came down. The water became choppy and rough, and the little duck completely lost sight of his reflection. And he had so completely identified with his reflection, that without it, he didn't know who he was. He became distraught...he swam first over here and then over there, trying to find calm water. The more upset he got, the more he flapped his wings, the more he tried to control the water, the more distorted his reflection became. Until finally, he could not see himself at all. Of course, the duck could have gotten out of the water at any time and taken shelter. He could have found solace and comfort, if only he could remember.

The duck, by its nature, always prefers calm water, but it has no control whatsoever over what the water is doing. There are forces at work beyond the duck's control...the weather, other animals, and a whole host of other factors.

We are like that duck, and the water is like our minds. We depend on our minds to help us navigate in the world...this is our nature. We spend most of our time in our minds. Sometimes our minds are calm, and we feel happy or content. But more of the time they are very active. There are many, many ripples in our minds almost all the time...let's call them thoughts.

And often, our minds experience storms...distractions, problems, worries, resentments, judgments. The more upsetting our thoughts become, the more we try to control our thoughts and what's going on, the more we lose sight of who we really are...we flap and carry on in all kinds of ways. At such times, we so completely identify with the mind, thinking that IT is who we are, that we become completely lost. Of course, like the duck, we have the power to leave our worries behind at any time we choose, but wrapped up in the storm of our minds, we forget.

We always prefer a calm, quiet, happy mind, but we have no control over the thoughts that arise. There are forces at work that are beyond our control...other people, jobs, illness, accidents, and a whole host of other factors.

As self-reflective beings, we set about trying to fix it...and we make matters worse. The Law of Cause and Effect seems to tell us that if we could just do the right things in the right order, everything would be okay. When it doesn't work, we blame ourselves and take on shame and guilt. And then, disappointed by one tradition or philosophy, we turn to another...maybe it's Karma, Maybe this is all happening because of some past lifetime, and there's nothing I can do about it. Approaching desperation, we begin to lose hope. So what do we do?

Stop...breathe...remember...The mind is not who you are, ever. Just like the duck is not part of the water. Ever. The duck is floating on the water...your consciousness, your awareness of being, is floating on the ripples of the mind. Each thought is like a ripple, a small wavelet...it arises, it peaks, and left to its own devices, it recedes. As it peaks, it may speak to you... "you shouldn't have done that"... "that was really stupid"... "maybe if you had only." Every thought has a beginning, a peak, and a finish. The same is true of our emotions, which are extensions of our thoughts.

The natural state of water, untouched by outer forces, is stillness. Its reflections are pure. Like water, the natural state of your mind is calm...in such a state, it perceives life as it truly is...undistorted. This is what the Buddhists refer to as Samatha (suh-muh-tuh), or tranquility of the mind.

But the mind is always creating ripples. Thoughts are always arising. The brain is a problem-solving machine...that's what it does. And each thought is capable of generating an emotion and its related chemical response in the body. Even so, there is hope...every one of us is capable of calming the mind...if we are willing.

As I said before, if we leave water alone, it will become still. It takes energy to create ripples. The mind is the same. If we leave our thoughts and emotions alone, our minds become calm. When the mind is calm, there is only awareness itself. There is nothing pulling my consciousness away from simply being. The Zen tradition calls this *empty mind*; the Christian tradition refers to it as *the renewing of the mind*. However we define it, the ancient wisdom traditions teach that we have the capacity.

The question becomes how...how do I leave my thoughts and emotions alone? Does this mean denying them, pretending they don't exist? No. It simply means acknowledging them, and then leaving them alone to run their course...not engaging them. Of their own accord, they will reach a peak and then recede, leaving a calm, clear mind behind. When the mind is calm, it is so much easier to recognize that our lives are filled with *So Many Blessings*.

## **Musical Meditation – *So Many Blessings* by Steven Walters**

### **Rev. Diana**

Human beings like tools. From ancient days, we learned that using tools can make our work easier. And so, we have developed tools for helping to calm the mind. And these tools can be useful as we begin our journey. We might begin by recognizing that our mind is becoming upset, that our thoughts are running away with us, and we might replace the negative or tumultuous thoughts with positive thoughts, or a mantra. We might develop a new habit to stop, breathe, whisper a short affirmation, and then begin again. When dealing with a mind run amuck, we must begin with *stop*. I would like to offer another lens through which we can view this process.

When our minds become disturbed, we tend to engage our thoughts and emotions. We talk to ourselves, we rehearse the upsetting scenes over and over in our minds, and we think about what we might do to control or fix the problem. In such moments, I am *being* the thought...I am *being* the emotion.

What if, as I stop and realize I am *being* the thought, I was able to take one tiny step back and *be with* the thoughts and emotions? Now I am one step removed from them. I am suddenly observing them rather than engaging with them. And then, after a few moments or even seconds of being with the thoughts and emotions, I simply *let them be*? I don't deny them, I don't stuff them...I simply let them be...I may experience them but without attachment or judgment, and then I lose interest in them and turn in another direction? This is what leaving them alone looks like.

I begin by engaging with or *being* the mind; I move into *being with* the mind; and then I *let the mind be*. It will regain its calm, it will come to a place of stillness, if I just *let it be*. And when it has become calm, I am in a much better place to consciously decide if there is anything I need to do or not. And I am in a much better position to recognize the many blessings in my life, even with the challenges.

### **Chris – Meditation**

Appreciating this moment of stillness, within and without, we are grateful for this opportunity to practice Peace of mind... to just let our minds do what they do... not getting caught up in the images... simply observing our thoughts and feelings as they arise... and subside... arise and subside... like waves flowing in... and out... <pause>

As we observe our internal states objectively, we realize that what we find is usually what we are looking for... If we look for something to worry about, there it is... If we look for a pleasant memory, that is what appears... When we expect mental turmoil, that is our experience... Let us then seek loving, uplifting thoughts... <pause>

Moses told the Israelites, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse.”<sup>1</sup>... Every day we make hundreds of choices... each one can be a blessing or a curse... Thousands of thoughts flood our minds... which ones shall we attend to? Which ones bring us more Peace?... more Joy?... more Love?... <pause>

The Nazarene Rabbi Yeshua taught us, “The Kingdom of Heaven is spread upon the earth, but people just don’t see it...”<sup>2</sup> Are we looking for the blessing?... or the curse?... Do we expect the best of our friends and family?... or are we afraid that they’ll let us down?...

Thinking well of the people in our life creates a space for them to show up as the best version of themselves... When we assume that they’ll disappoint us, we limit our ability to perceive them responding to us in new ways... Whether we are looking for a blessing or for a curse, we will find that which we seek... Let us then take this time to contemplate our blessings in the Sacred Silence...

### **Silence – 3:00**

This time of Holy Communion with Spirit and with our Beloved Community is truly a blessing... We are grateful for both the obvious blessings and the apparent challenges that Life brings our way, for they all serve to grow us...

Thank you, God, for everything...

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Please affirm with me that our thoughts, words, and actions align with our deepest spiritual intention, and that we are all inspired daily to give full expression to the gifts

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 11:26

<sup>2</sup> The Gospel of Thomas, Logion 113

given us. The light of our souls shines brightly as we express powerful spiritual qualities in this world. \*\*\*

As Rev. Diana continues her inspiring message this morning, we remember that we receive So Many Blessings... And that is where we choose to focus our attention...

### **Rev. Diana – Invitation to Practice**

Gratefulness opens my heart and leads to caring...as I notice the many blessings in my life, I am shown what I deem important...what I care about. Caring leads to tending...tending to what matters most is my way of continuing the flow of blessing and making the world a more loving and peaceful place. When this great-fullness sparks me to the action of tending, I am engaged in Sacred Service...in serving God by serving another. And in this sacred act of service, *my* life is enhanced, for we are all One.

I'd like to share a reading with you from *Waking Up to What Is...* by Kristi Nelson. She says:

“Gratefulness offers a merciful path for walking through life with our eyes and hearts wide open. It supports us to attend to the potency of what is life-affirming, beautiful, and moving in our exact moments of broken heartedness.

It invites us to sit with paradox in more fully noticing the magnificence of humanity as we face the mire. It asks us to live with poignancy, holding the concurrent truths that life is both extraordinarily precious and stunningly fleeting...(Pause)

Gratefulness keeps us awake and activates our hearts toward greater clarity and courage. Being awake in this way, we become alert to, appreciative of, and alive for the things that matter to us. We attend to life and act on its behalf instead of waiting for life to attend to us.(Pause)

Gratefulness suggests that everything in life warrants our greatest presence. And presence is precisely what makes us available for perspective and a sense of possibility, the agency of which fuels energy, imagination, and innovation to help us build a more hopeful future...

The ability to wake up to another new day – one with which we will surely need to wrestle and reckon, but one that will teach and transform us, one we will be able to influence and impact, one in which we can always declare and share love - *this* is the unpromised gift for which to be grateful. This is the opportunity not to take for granted. Because if we are truly awake, we know that one unpredictable day, we will simply not have the gift of another day – a day such as today, with all of its beauty and pain, opportunity and beckoning possibility.”

What if I related to gratitude as a verb, an action word, instead of a noun? And what if, every day this week, I was to choose a gratitude practice as the focus for my day?

What if...Several times each day, I took the time to look at the sky — to notice the changing clouds and colors...to say *thank you* aloud to the sky and its varied elements. How might this change my experience of the moment?

What if...several times each day, I looked directly into the face of another and simply smiled without words. What might happen? What would it feel like to show appreciation for someone? What would I feel in my body? In my heart?

What if...before going to bed for the night, I was to write down all the things I did to leave the day better than you found it, showing deep appreciation to and for myself?

What if...I was to go for a walk and notice all of the natural and human-made wonders that give me a sense of “awe.” What might the impact be?

What if...I was to offer a heartfelt thanks to the All-That-Is for the gift of nourishment, and for all of the hands that it took to put the food on my table, at every meal?

What if...I was to send a thank you card in the mail to someone I love? Or leave a thank you note on the pillow of my beloved? What seeds of love might be planted by this simple act?

And what if...I began the day by writing a thank-you note to God for five things in my life...and what if I decided to thank God for five new things every morning...never repeating? How might this change my perspective? How might this change my life?

### **Musical Meditation – *God, Bless Us All* by Jan Garrett & JD Martin**

#### **Rev. Diana**

I invite you to take my prayer as your own.

As we close our service this morning, we take the time to mindfully acknowledge the abundance of Life...knowing that there is One Source, pouring Itself forth in Infinite Variety...expressing Itself intentionally and perfectly as each and every being. As I turn to that One, I Am so incredibly grateful.

I know that Its Presence, Power, and Intelligence is what I Am. I recognize all of Life as an incredible blessing.

As I offer myself whole-heartedly to the work of giving thanks for all that I have been given, I am showered with blessings...ever-growing, always multiplied by my gratitude...by the attention given to acknowledging the One in all that I have, in all that I see.



In knowing this Great-Fullness, feeling deep gratitude, and offering thanksgiving, I am a beneficial presence on the planet, I am lifted up; and as I Am lifted, so are we all lifted...for truly, we are One.

And from this higher state of consciousness, I consciously choose to envision a world in which humankind is living peacefully together...a world in which every being is experiencing Joy, Abundance, and Freedom. Knowing that Peace exists, that Love is real, I feel and know our world as a Peaceful place...where all beings practice loving kindness, compassion, and generosity with each other...where all humans respect and care for our planet as a cherished Home...where all beings have everything needed to experience fullness of life...nourishing food, the safety and comfort of home, medical care and education, healthy relationships, right livelihood, creative contribution, and a sense of belonging. I feel and know a world without greed, where there is abundance in having *enough*...where every being, as a precious creation of God, is deserving of all the blessings life has to offer.

As I lean into the Radiant Light, the Infinite Intelligence, Divine Wisdom, Powerful Presence, and Limitless Love that is God, I trust that my Vision is coming into form and experience here and now as Wholeness is revealed. This can only be so, for it is by God's infallible Law that my Word is made manifest.

As I choose to know with all that I Am that all is well, I align myself with God...I Am at Peace.

And so we, as part of a global web of gratitude, give thanks for all of the blessings of this day. We give thanks for the presence of mind that allows us to live each moment fully and mindfully.

We acknowledge the Goodness of Life...and we consciously stand in the flow of Grace that lifts us and carries us on our way.

In deep faith that Divine Order guides the cosmos and all of Creation, I release this prayer...to continue its Good Work...and knowing it is so, I let it be. And so it is. Amen!

### **Rev. Diana – Moving Into Celebration**

Please repeat after me as together we affirm... *There is Power in our Prayer...There is Power in our Vision...We are changing the world from the inside out...here and now... And so it is! Amen!*

I've already given you your homework for the week, so let's move on into Celebration! Celebration is an important part of our Spiritual Practice. As we appreciate the gifts in our lives, more are given. It is a cycle...Divine Circulation.

Please join me now in celebrating the Good Works of our local Good News Rescue Mission.

## Good News Rescue Mission Thanksgiving

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhTXjqD8iZg>

### Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Each Sunday, we invite you to join in the celebration of the work we are doing in the world by sharing of your financial Good, should you choose to. If you are at home, you can go to **mysticheart.org** to use our Donate Button or to find our mailing address.

We also have a Gracious Giving Program for those who would like to make a heartfelt monthly commitment of support so that we can more effectively plan for our growth and our monthly spending. I would be happy to give you more information.

As we move into this time of giving, let these words reverberate in your heart and mind, knowing the Power of our word; and know how much we appreciate your gifts:

**As I awaken to the God within me and all around me, I see Abundance everywhere I look. I consciously step into that flow of Abundance by this act of giving. I bless this gift, sending it forth to heal and prosper. It is evidence of my deep faith. It does good work in the world and blesses all of Creation. I give from a consciousness of Abundance! And so it is! Amen!**

Don't hesitate to get up and move, as we celebrate...

### Offertory Video – *Living in the Overflow* by Charity Gayle and Joshua Sherman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmAfEI-lbgc>

### Gratitude Prayer – Sherri & Rev. Diana

### April's Invitation to the 12 Days of Kindness

### Invitations – Sherri

 **Tuesdays, 3-5 pm** – Please join Michael Bordeaux for ***Secrets of the Lost Mode of Prayer*** by Gregg Braden. Movie this week, all are welcome.


 **Thursdays, 3-5 pm** – *Metaphysical Bible* (on-going, drop-ins always welcome)

### Looking Ahead...


 ***Mystic OAKS Adventure Group: The Schreder Planetarium: THE CHRISTMAS STAR...Saturday, December 3 from 7:00 – 9:00 pm.***


Contact Rev. Diana for more information or to make your reservation. Tickets

are \$12 per person. **RSVP/payment in advance is required. 4 Seats are still available. Reserve your seats today!**

 **Mystic OAKS Adventure Group: Redding Lights at Turtle Bay, Thursday, December 16 from 7:00 – 9:00 pm.** Contact Rev. Diana for more information or to make your reservation. Tickets are \$9 for seniors, \$12 for adults, and \$6 per child 5-15 years with our membership discount.

**RSVP/payment in advance is required.**

 **The Two Christmas Stories: A Mystical Look** with Chris Johnson, RScP. **Saturday, December 18 from 10 am – 3:30 pm.** Did you know that the Christian Bible tells two very different Christmas stories? Join Chris in this mystical exploration. Lunch will be provided by the Rev. Contact Chris for more information and registration.

 **You Are the Light: A Christmas Candle Lighting, Wednesday, December 22 from 7 – 8:30 pm.** Please join Mystic Heart as we honor the world's winter traditions and celebrations, each of which invites us to prepare for the return, or the revealing, of the Light. Please reserve your seat with Rev. Diana, as our seating is limited.

If you'd like prayer support, we have prayer request cards and envelopes on the fireplace, as well. If you would like to meet with a Prayer Practitioner in person, I am available for a quick prayer after the service. Or contact one of the Mystic Heart Practitioners for a full Session during the week. Our contact information is listed in the bulletin and on our website, as are all of the Mystic Heart events and activities.

To continue the celebration, there is food and fellowship next door immediately following the service. So let's stand and sing our closing song.

**Closing Song: *Love Be with You***, written by Lainey Bernstein, RScP and Gary Lynn Floyd

**Close of Service**