

Grateful for Absolutely Everything

Sunday, November 19th, 2023



Rev. Diana Johnson, with Lucinda Alton, RScP & Chris Johnson, RScP

Taizé

A Beloved Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

Lucinda – Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana – Welcome...if you're new with us here this morning, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystical Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. I welcome you home to our Spiritual Community (should you choose it). Even more, I welcome you home to the answers that lie within your own Mystic Heart.

Rev. Diana & Chris – Taizé Chants

 **Welcome Home to Your Mystic Heart**, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 **Thank You God**, written by Eddie Watkins, Jr.

Rev. Diana – Settling into this sacred moment, we breathe in the Presence of Spirit, allowing it to fill our being...and then breathe out...sharing the deep Peace that dwells forever within. Breathing in Presence, breathing out Peace.

We share in sacred Communion this morning...we share in Sacred Community...as we slow the pace of life for just a little while, opening ourselves to the Voice of Spirit...giving ourselves this most precious gift of time...time to breathe...time to be present...time to listen...time to feel.

Together, we honor and give thanks for our connection with all of Life as we envision a web of consciousness...a Holy Presence...that surrounds, contains, and infuses the planet, giving Life to all that is. With the Inner Eye, we see ourselves and one another as sparks of Divine Light...perfect expressions of the One Source. Every human...every other-than-human creature...every plant...shining with the Light of Spirit...we acknowledge the Light shining from the soil beneath our feet, and from the network of life that lives beneath the surface, invisible to the naked eye...from the rocks and minerals...water and wind...the heavenly bodies...

All of Life is aglow with One Radiant Light. There is no separation between us...we sense and know our inherent Connection with All That Is. As a human family, with unique gifts to offer, we acknowledge our role as caretakers...in Sacred Service to one another...to all life forms...and to the planet that sustains us all.

As we share this time, we set a prayerful intention...we are leaving an imprint of Peace on the world...a ripple of Compassion that Comforts all who are in need...we consciously offer our time together to the Well-being of the Whole.

This month we are considering what it means to **Take More Time, Cover Less Ground**, and this morning, we'll be spend time in contemplation of what it means to be **Grateful for Absolutely Everything**.

The topic of Gratitude, and the benefits of having a Gratitude Practice, have become widespread. Something deep inside us knows that being grateful for our many blessings is a good idea. Appreciation is a creative act that grows more Goodness in our lives. And yet we forget...we get wrapped up in the day-to-day experiences, some of which can be challenging...and we lose sight of the gift that every moment has to offer. We take for granted the people and circumstances in our lives...we forget that not everyone wakes up in a warm bed...has access to hot coffee or tea...and the luxury of a hot shower. The little things...

We are often made grateful when our bodies return to health after an illness... or when we find the perfect job after a long period of financial challenge...or someone we returns safely after a long period of time away. Take a moment to recall a time when you were flooded with gratitude...

How did it feel? How long did that feeling last? Is that level of gratitude with you still? My guess is that it comes and goes. Maintaining a grateful perspective is a true practice.

Just as keeping our muscles strong takes commitment, so does grateful living. The capacity for a grateful perspective is a muscle that needs to be built and used, nurtured, and tended daily. The practice of looking at my life, and at the world, through grateful eyes and with a grateful heart is an amazing gift in and of itself. It helps me to focus on what is working and what is enough. It helps me to stop and notice the amazing beauty that surrounds me...the breathtaking moments that sprinkle themselves throughout my day.

“Even in the most challenging times, from a grateful perspective I can see that there is an opportunity to learn, to deepen trust, to love, and to breathe. Fixing my awareness on what is available and possible in each moment – what is sufficient and sacred – I am less inclined to take life for granted...Grateful living reconnects me with a fidelity to life. And fidelity reminds me what a gift it is to be alive, and that it could always – and will someday – be otherwise.”
(Waking Up Grateful, Kristi Nelson)

Imagine being able to have gratitude that is sustainable...unconditional... that comes from the inside out...not a “reaction to something, but a proactive approach to life.” Imagine having gratitude already present as you open your eyes in the morning. This is Gratefulness. Gratitude as we know it waits for something good to happen...Gratefulness asks only that we are awake....paying attention and acknowledging the Great Fullness of Life.

Please don't misunderstand...I am not making light of the many challenges we face in our lives and in our world, or suggesting that we deny our suffering, or make it worthy of praise. We all experience things that leave us feeling disconnected and disoriented. Loss, disappointment, abrupt changes, heartache, tension...can knock us off course in any given moment. To navigate our way through takes resilience. Maintaining a grateful perspective builds resilience; "it can offer a compass and trail markers to help you find your way back to a state of well-being...(it) becomes your True North."

Sharing her hard-earned wisdom, Kristi Nelson, author of *Waking Up Grateful* suggests that "we can learn to feel grateful in every moment, and better able to recognize and seize opportunities for learning, insight, love, and action in the midst of our challenges. Gratefulness is an activator, not a pacifier. To acknowledge that something is true does not mean that it is acceptable, but we can only respond effectively once we see clearly what is happening. The more we are in touch with the great fullness of life, the more we can respond with great fullness of heart."

Chris – Guided Meditation

The word *grateful* derives from the Latin *gratus*, meaning *pleasing* or *agreeable*... We feel grateful when we have a pleasant experience... or when someone does something nice that we appreciate... *Gratus* is also the root for the Italian *grazie* and for *gracias* in Spanish, both of which mean *thank you*...

Gratus also gives the word *gratis*, meaning freely given... as a gift, with no strings attached... When we receive a gift, the only appropriate response is to be grateful... Even if it is not something we really wanted, we can appreciate that someone is thinking of us... and invested the time and effort on our behalf...

Our Life itself is a Divine Gift... freely given... Every breath... each heartbeat... every moment a Holy Opportunity to share the best that is within us... Yet, some of these moments don't *feel* like gifts... they challenge us... hurt us... erode our faith... make us weep... They are not wrapped in pretty paper, ribbons, and bows...

Life calls us to look beyond appearances... to have faith that – even in *this* – there is a gift... a chance for us to become *more*... We've all had challenging experiences that transformed us in ways that we could only appreciate years later... The Gift was there all along... but hidden within the struggle, pain, or grief...

As we share our three minutes of Silent Contemplation this morning, I invite you to consider a difficulty you once faced... one that challenged and changed you, and made you grow in ways that you might otherwise not have... one where you were only able to see the blessing much later... Holding that gift in deep gratitude, bring it forward to an ordeal you currently face... one that shrouds any trace of a gift... Let that memory arouse and fortify your faith... *Know* that you will indeed receive the hidden blessing...

Silence – 3:00

Allowing the music to gently usher our attention back to this present moment, we are grateful for this Life... in *all* of its beautiful messiness... trusting that Divine Wisdom guides the process, ever toward the Highest Good for us, and for all Creation... Thank you, God, for everyone and for everything...

When we experience challenges, it can be difficult to believe there is a gift here... When we remember previous hard times – and the blessings we received – we grow our trust that ultimately something Good will come of this... and then, *we walk by faith, not by sight*...

As Rev. Diana continues her inspired message this morning we allow our faith to expand... and to encourage us to find the Divine Gift in every situation... No matter the challenge we face, we can truly be *Grateful for Absolutely Everything*...

Rev. Diana – Gratefulness is a way of being that helps us to “focus attention and navigate life with gratitude as our compass.” It is not so difficult to live a grateful life. I look at it this way...my life is made up of days, which are made up of moments. All it takes to move into a more grateful perspective is to slow down...savor the moments...be grateful for some person or experience as often as you can. There is a simple Practice offered by Br. David Steindl-Rast...it is this: Stop...Look...Go.

That's it...Stop everything for just a moment...Look for any blessing or opportunity, no matter how big or small...and Go...give thanks and return to what you were doing.

Let's try it together now...Stop...Stop doing anything for just a moment...and Look for any blessing that is present in this moment. Savor the blessing...savor the feeling...and Go...now we're back, listening. Such a simple practice, but always easy to remember. So let's take a moment now to consider...how will you remember to Stop, Look, and Go?

Will it be anytime you get up to refill your water glass? Or every time you receive a text message? Will you connect it to going into a particular room in your house, or going through any doorway? Choose something that will help you remember to practice gratitude...to stop, look, go...to live from a more grateful perspective. (Pause)

Closing Prayer – We close this morning's Taizé in Prayer and Musical Meditation.

Musical Meditation – *Give Thanks*, by India Arie

<https://youtu.be/lsgb0SqNb8>

Rev. Diana – Coming back into the awareness of our bodies...our senses...the atmosphere in the room, we open our eyes and allow our gaze to take in whatever is before you. Feel free to look around and say good morning to everyone who is here celebrating with you this morning. This is your Spiritual Family...one of your support systems. These are some of the people who care about you and are there for you if you need anything.

Love Offering

As we close our Taizé Meditation, we offer the opportunity for you to share your financial good in support of the work we do should you choose to do so. If you're joining us online, you can find a Donate Button and our mailing address at mysticheart.org. And we thank you in advance for your gifts.

Offertory Video– *A Grateful Day*, by Br. David Steindl-Rast

https://youtu.be/zSt7k_q_qRU

Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Rev. Diana & Chris – Closing Song

A Soul's Blessing, written by Chris Johnson

Conscious Conversation

Lucinda – Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana – Good morning and welcome, or welcome back...welcome to those joining online. If you're new with us here this morning... my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Independent Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. Welcome home to our Gathering Place, to our Spiritual Family, and to the answers that lie within your own Mystic Heart. I invite you to get on your feet and join the music.

Rev. Diana & Chris – Opening Music

 ***Welcome to the Mystic Heart***, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 ***One Big Family***, written by Robin Hackett & Gary Lynn Floyd

 ***Spirit, Run My Life***, written by Andy Anderson

Rev. Diana – Calling Awareness to the Presence of Spirit in the body...join me in the co-creation of a ***Love-Soaked World...***

...where all humans embody Compassion, Generosity, Love, Peace, and Justice...where all people everywhere honor and care for one another, for the earth that sustains us, and for every life form that shares this beautiful planet with us.

We are creating a world where all needs are met gracefully...easily...where all beings are well-fed, and have the safety and comfort of home...where mental/physical health, education, and healthy relationships are promoted and supported by social systems grounded in Wellness and Wholeness...

...a world where every being Serves the greater community doing whatever feeds their souls and are well supported for their time and talent...and by their Service, each one finds meaning...belonging...

A world in which all beings are valued and respected for their uniqueness...where Authenticity and Integrity are the norm...where the Peace and Kindness we cultivate within shows up as a world free of hatred or violence.

With our growing Awareness, and by the Power of our collective intention, we are writing a new story...a story in which there is no greed, and abundance means having all that is required for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual thriving.

We *do not* lower our Vision, no matter the appearances in the world, knowing with our whole hearts that such a world is *inevitable*. We align our actions to support our Vision, and a new world is being born.

Our hearts, minds, arms, and doors are open in Radical Welcome. All lines and feelings of separation have been erased. In keeping with the Vision, our community is open and loving...all people who seek belonging find it here.

By the power of our faith, this prayer is acted upon, answered even before it is spoken. In preparation for its Graceful unfolding in the world...we feel a deep sense of gratitude...releasing to the One and giving thanks that it is done...And so it is...Amen!

Let's take a moment to bask in that creative and powerful energy...look around to say good morning to your Spiritual Family...some of the people who care about you...people you can count on when you need a hand.

If you were with us at Taizé this morning, you know that our topic of Conversation this month is ***Take More Time, Cover Less Ground***. At this morning's Gathering, we expressed our ***Gratitude for Absolutely Everything***. We considered the idea that Gratitude is a state of mind, a way of being in the world...that we begin by taking the time to make being grateful a living practice...and that it is a Practice.

And we had to admit that when we don't make a Practice of being grateful and giving thanks, we can begin to take things for granted.

Does anyone here ever take anything for granted?

What kinds of things do we take for granted?

I would like to use our Conscious Conversation this morning as a great big Gratitude Practice. Let's start with...

Name one thing that happened this past week that you are most grateful for.

What about in the past year?

Okay, if I asked you to look back over the course of your lifetime, what one thing are you most grateful for?

Is there something that all of these things have in common?

(They are all positive things, things we would call *good*.)

Now, let's up the ante a little bit. Can you think of one thing that you might have judged as bad in the past, when it first happened, that you now count as a blessing? That definitely changed your life for the better somehow?

Grace comes in many forms. What do I mean by this?

I believe that there is an Intelligence always at work using all things for Good, using all things for our growth and expansion. It doesn't matter to me what you choose to call It. I call It God, or Spirit.

My personal understanding of God is that It is a Universal Living Presence, an all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present Sentience that is the heart and the mind *in* and *of* all that exists, and that It goes beyond existence, beyond what can be seen or measured. So for me, Grace comes in many forms means that if there is something that my soul is ready to learn, if there is something that my particular expression of Divinity is ready to know as part of its journey onward...and if, in my humanness, I am not heading in the direction of that experience...then by God's Grace, by the Infinite Intelligence at the heart of all that is, I will be *redirected*.

If I'm paying attention, if my ego is not in complete control of this body and I'm *listening* and *correcting*, the redirection will be gentle. If I'm not, whammo!

Just because it's painful doesn't mean it isn't Graceful. One of the most challenging aspects of this spiritual journey has been learning to surrender all that I think I know...to submit myself to God's Grace in all of its forms. It takes emotional maturity to move into that kind of humility.

How do you define humility?

(It is the Father within that does the work...I my will but thine be done. My perceptions are not always aligned with Truth...they are incomplete.)

One final question to bring us back around to our topic this week, Gratefulness...How are humility and gratefulness linked?

(Only when I am truly humble do I recognize everything as Gift. I know that my life and all that it offers are freely given by some Mysterious Something that I will never comprehend, and I am grateful for the experience. I take nothing for granted.)

Closing Prayer – Let's close our time together in prayer.

Welcome back! So good to have you here this morning...such a blessing to have time with Spiritual Family. Time is our greatest gift, and it does not go unnoticed that you are sharing your greatest gift with me...with us.

Love 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 budget and plan for our growth.




This video is a little longer than usual, but I encourage you to follow along with the lyrics. It reflects that kind of Grace we've been talking about...Enjoy!

Offertory Video – *Gratitude* by Jason Mraz.





https://youtu.be/OO_zBlrZmY8

Lucinda – Blessing for the Offering

Lucinda – Invitations

-  **Tonight at 7:00 pm, *Shasta Interfaith Thanksgiving Service* at St. Joseph's...** Please consider joining us for this beautiful Interfaith Experience of Gratitude in the Season of Thanksgiving.
-  **This week is dark at the Gathering Place. Regular activities will resume next Sunday with our Sunday Service.**
-  **12 Days of Kindness is underway for 2023! Please bring socks, instant coffee packets, and toothbrushes for the month of November. We'll add new items when we reach 150 of each.**

Looking Ahead...

-  **Our next Mystic Heart Fun-raiser - Saturday, December 2nd, 11:00 am – 1:30/2:00 pm, Dr. Sharon Brisolaro will be leading *Playing with Words*, a poetry workshop. She is funded by a grant and will be donating all of the proceeds to Mystic Heart. Snacks will be provided. Suggested Donation: \$20, all offerings gratefully accepted.**
-  **Saturday, December 9th, 1:30 - 4:00 pm, Ellie Thompson will be leading a *Holiday Whimsy Wreathmaking Play Shop*. 10 seats available. Snacks will be provided. Suggested Donation: \$20 – RSVP required to attend.**
-  **Saturday, December 16th, 1-4 pm - April Jiménez WinterSky will be leading a *Medicine Wheel Workshop*. Snacks will be provided. Suggested Donation: \$20 – RSVP required to attend.**
-  **Wednesday, December 20th, 6:30 - 8:00 pm, Mystic Heart Holy Day Service, a Taizé-Style Journey of Music, Meditation, and Prayer, shining our Light on the world...more information to come soon!**

There is more information about all of our events and activities in your Bulletin and on our website.

Prayer Requests, Lucinda is (I am) available after service, Information Cards if new people

Closing Song – Love Be With You



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¹ 2 Corinthians, 5-7