

## **Gratitude: A Practical Road To Humility**

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**Thanksgiving Interfaith Service November 26, 2015**  
**Centenary Methodist Church**

### **Recitation of Qur'an**

#### **Khutba ( Sermon)**

**In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate**

**Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds**

**The Merciful, the Compassionate**

**Master of the Day of Judgment.**

**You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help.**

**Guide us to the straight way.**

**The way of those whom You have blessed, not the way of those on whom is Your anger, nor those who are astray. (Qur'an 1:1 Al Fatiha)**

Dear Friends, dear lovers and servants of the Almighty, brothers and sisters in the family of Adam and Isaac, Abraham and Moses; Jesus and Muhammad, (peace be upon them all.) It is said in our tradition, 'God's greatest gift to us is the gift of remembrance and our greatest gift to God is remembering God's presence in all things and giving thanks for that gift.'

No one can remember something they never truly experienced. We can remember what we were told or a picture we were shown, but we affirm that remembering the Divine is only possible because we have experienced the Divine. And remembering the Divine as Present each and every moment is enabled by gratitude. Gratitude is the path to humility, which is the doorway to Peace and security, the abode of a clean and pure heart.

I am honored and grateful, indeed humbled, to be asked to stand before you today as we turn our attention to God (Allah) in giving Thanks for the blessings of this life, blessings that come to us clothed in beauty and, at times, veiled in misery.

At the very core of a Muslim's belief is the knowledge that all people are born essentially good; that our role in life is to manifest that goodness by serving God, through serving others. Our safety, security and peace (al Islam) lie in living in remembrance and thankfulness to Allah (God), Out of whose attributes we, and this world, were created.

The One God who has suffused within the mirror of Creation the reflection of all the Divine attributes: Compassion (Rahmah) (Peace and security) As Salaam, Love (Wudud), Justice (Al Adl) and countless other attributes, all seeded within the soul of the human being.

God is present; Present within our souls and hearts, present in our daily lives, present in our moment to moment thoughts and responses. Present as the seeds of spring are hidden in the earth, awaiting the right conditions for sprouting. Present as the essence of goodness lies in the core of the hearts of all women and men. Waiting to be awakened in the right conditions, at the right moment.

It is said in our tradition that the straightest path to God is the path of shukur, Thankfulness. Which in Arabic also means gratitude and sweetness. How sweet it is to be aware we are in the Presence of the Divine! Yet all that potential for love and caring, giving and sharing, protecting and respecting becomes sullied and disabled in the reflection of distorted mirror, a heart not polished by love and compassion.

In 1898 My maternal grandmother, Katherine Minor, fleeing from the pogroms in Latvia, Russia came to Ellis Island in NYC, under the gaze of the Statue of Liberty. After fleeing Latvia hidden in a hay wagon and spending time in France, she boarded a ship to a world totally different from her village life--where her uncle was lynched for being a Jewish man among the millions in near perpetual Diaspora.

My grandmother worked at night cleaning a bar over which she and her three children lived in a cold-water-flat. She saw to their needs, educated them, affirmed with

daily gratitude and never asking ‘why me’ about her displacement. “MomMom” (what I called her) provided, supported and encouraged my mother and her sister to attend Teachers College. Eventually, with the help of my father, her son (my uncle) became a world-renowned surgeon and Nobel Prize nominee. We assimilated to America and became part of America’s definition of its own culture. A tossed salad of races, religions, cultures, ideas. My grandmother was ever thankful, she, my mother and my aunt were never heard uttering a negative phrase or criticism of life or other people. They were thankful/filled with gratitude and peaceful people. My mother went on to be a teacher and a concert pianist, my aunt a teacher. I wish I could walk in their shoes; perhaps life has been too easy for me to accomplish that fully.

Some say suffering creates such beauty and strength...and that may be true, but we also see what else it can engender in today’s world. It inspires the helping hands, the open hearts, the resiliency of character that transcends culture, race, religion, gender, and nationality; qualities present in all you who are here today.

I know that because each one of you is taking time from family (and from cooking, eating, shopping, and football) to join in prayer and celebration, in humble service and giving. For you and I would not be here unless we wanted to affirm our Gratitude, our Thanks and to give opportunity to others.

In Islam we are enjoined that no harm must come to anyone by the hand of believer, nor restrictions on their faith or property or freedom. Never aggression or violence, never bigotry and hate. Yet today, as we stand here to give thanks, the world around us is in turmoil and the fear-mongerers are seizing every opportunity for selfish gain to forget the basic principles of our spiritual and religious heritage.

I fear this is not the first time, nor will it be the last. The Torah, the New Testament, the Gita, the Qur’an describe conflict and wrong actions and man’s in humanity to man...yes it is usually man... but as we saw last week, also young women and children were pulled into the abyss of lies, misrepresentation and violence.

The same core of evil we also see daily in our own country, only not called terrorism. In Chicago, Baltimore and other cities, in Newtown and Sandyhook... We must educate, provide opportunity, support and give meaning to these young people; break down barriers of race, religion, nationality, and share the beauty of this creation.

We have forgotten that the limitations and imperfections and the challenges can also be opportunities, given to us by the Divine, for strengthening our self and our society; opportunities to remember to believe and to perform good deeds.

The teaching has come to us that ‘The very heart of all matters is giving thanks...for giving thanks is to know that everything comes from God and then to use that thanks as a means of obeying God.’

Let us take today-- this holiday of Thanksgiving-- as an opportunity to turn our attention away from our weaknesses and turn it toward gratitude to Allah (God) for what is before us in the moment, for where we are placed, for the good acts we can perform.

The reflection of the Divine Presence is in the human being. A Theophany. The Giver and the Thankful is also the Compassionate and the Merciful, the Just and the Peaceful, the Forgiver and the Guide, the Lover and the Hidden...Allah...God . To the believer, God, Allah is Present Here and now, reflected in a mirror of Allah’s creation.

The reflection has no reality but for the Object front of it. Our challenge is to polish the mirror of the heart so there is no distortion, no misrepresentation.

On a day like today, Allah is present in our lives as, Ash Shukr, The Grateful/ the Thankful.

He is present every day to the degree we are conscious of and sincere in our gratitude. He is present to the degree we give our thanks to Him. He is present to the degree we yearn to see and hear and serve and reflect, and reflect upon the Divine.

In the Qur’an Allah says: **“I am with my believer...” ‘They love me and I love them. Those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, and establish regular prayers and pay charity, will have their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. ) (Al-Baqarah 2: 277)**

Today, and insh'Allah (God-Willing) everyday, we are Thankful for the bounties bestowed upon us. While at the same time we must be ever aware of those whose lives are filled with loss and grief, who are victims of unwarranted disease and oppression and who suffer due to the greed and the ignorance, arrogance and irresponsibility, bigotry, ignorance of other human beings.

We have had, here in Lynchburg, a glorious, beautiful Fall. The natural beauty is an opportunity for Thanks-Giving to rise from our soul; we are privy to the changing of the colors, the clear star-filled nights, the crisp breezes--all harbingers of Winters' pause, and testimony to the magnificence and the beauty that is God. Al Jamal, Al Jalal, The beautiful and the Majestic.

**It is Allah Who hath created the heavens and the earth and sends down rain from the skies, and with it bring out fruits wherewith to feed you: it is He Who hath made the ships subject to you, that they may sail through the sea by His Command; and the rivers (also) has He made subject to you. And He has made subject to you the sun and the moon, both diligently pursuing their courses: and the Night and the Day has He (also) made subject to you. And He gives you of all that you ask for. But if you count the favors of Allah, never will you be able to number them. Verily, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude.)** (Ibrahim 14: 31-34)

Only days and weeks ago natural disasters consumed homes in California, earthquakes devastated villages in Nepal and the lives of children and whole families have ended in their seeking to escape by rafts from Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Libya.

We have all have contributed to relief efforts in the past. We have sighed and wept at the pictures of loss and devastation, turned inward to seek understanding and to find the words and the actions that would comfort those in loss and grief. God's message and mercy, compassion and love is present in our lives, but we must never forget that our duty lies beyond the formal worship or writing a check.

Indeed as we see the criminal violence in the name of Islam in Europe and other parts of the world we have to take up the affirmation of our Jewish Brothers and Sisters... "Never again" never again can race or religion or ethnicity or gender be the excuse for genocide. Something we hoped had ended at the close of WWII has continued in the world: In Darfour, in Namibia, Bosnia Herzegovina, China, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, Central African Republic, and more .

**Then we made you our representatives on the earth after them, that we might see how you would behave. Qur'an Yunnus 10:14**

Often one finds it hard to be Thankful at times when there seems to be so much tragedy and catastrophe, but we have to be grateful that we still have the ability to understand what our role and responsibility is to be vice-regents (stewards), caring for each other and creation with humility .

Gratitude affects not only our relationship with God and others, but it can heal our heart and our soul. It is said that the belief of one age is the science of the next and so it is true. Perhaps you heard on NPR on Monday the scientific proof of effectively adding gratitude to your daily life.

Dr. Paul Mills, a professor of family medicine and public health at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine has been researching behavior and heart health for decades.

He recruited 186 men and women, average age 66, who already had some damage to their heart, either through years of sustained high blood pressure or as a result of heart attack or even an infection of the heart itself. They each filled out a standard questionnaire to rate how grateful they felt for the people, places or things in their lives.

It turned out the more grateful people were, the healthier they were. "They had less depressed mood, slept better and had more energy," says Mills.

And when Mills did blood tests to measure inflammation, the body's natural response to injury, or plaque buildup in the arteries, he found lower levels among those who were grateful — an indication of better heart health.

So Mills did a small follow-up study to look even more closely at gratitude. He tested 40 patients for heart disease and noted biological indications of heart disease such as inflammation and heart rhythm. Then he asked half of the patients to keep a journal most days of the week, and write about two or three things they were grateful for. People wrote about everything, from appreciating children to being grateful for spouses, friends, pets, travel, jobs and even good food.

After two months, Mills retested all 40 patients and found health benefits for the patients who wrote in their journals. Inflammation levels were reduced, and heart rhythm improved. And when he compared their heart disease risk before and after journal writing, there was a decrease in risk after two months of writing in their journals.

I have used the work of Dr. Mills and others studying the science of gratitude in my lectures recently and I am glad that this research has become more public. Let me share it with you and engage with you in a brief exercise. An opportunity for tranquility and remembrance.

**[INTRODUCE BOOKLET and Pause for people to write]**

In conclusion today, let us take a moment to contemplate our Lord and Creators' Presence. In the Quran Allah swt reveals:

**Those who securely believe and whose hearts have been made tranquil by the remembrance of Allah. Truly in the remembrance of Allah the hearts find tranquility. Qur'an Ar-Ra'da 23:28**

**The Prophet, blessings of Allah and peace be upon him, said: "Never is a group seated in the Remembrance of Allah the Most High, other than angels surround**

**them and mercy covers them and peaceful repose descends upon them and Allah remembers them to those with Him.”**

Let us turn our attention inward and seek the Divine names and attributes in the core of our hearts.

(SILENCE)

*I am grateful to You for compassion for you are The Compassionate*

*I am grateful to You for mercy for You are The Merciful*

*I am grateful to You for forgiveness for You are The Forgiver*

*I am grateful to You for love for You are the All Loving*

*I am grateful to You for patience for You are The Patient*

*I am grateful to You for generosity for You are The Generous*

*I am grateful to You for protection for You are The Protector*

*I am grateful to You for life and existence for You are The Ever living and Self-Existing*

*I am grateful to You for this thankfulness for You are the Most Thankful*

*The rewarder of gratitude.*

Prayer Read by Shaykh Rashid:

*My Lord; the uninterrupted flow of Your graciousness has distracted me from thanking you properly.*

*The flood of Your bounty has rendered me incapable of counting Your praises.*

*The succession of Your acts of kindness has diverted me from mentioning you!*

*The continuous rush of Your benefits has thwarted my efforts to spread the news of Your gentle favors.!...You are the Merciful, The Compassionate, The Good, the Generous, who does not disappoint those who seek You or cast out from Your courtyard those who have expectations of You! ...*



*My God, my thanksgiving is small before Your great gifts and my praise ...shrinks before Your generosity to me! ....Your favors are many and my understanding of them falls short.*

(Imam Jaf'ar Sadiq...the great grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (sal))

I beseech you Allah for your forgiveness for any errors I have made today and for your love, tolerance, wisdom and humility to guide us and those who would lead us in these difficult times that they may make decisions that are based on Mercy, Compassion, Courage and Humility.

May there be no contention between us.

Asalaaam aleikum wa Rahmatullahe wa Barakatuhu– Peace and Blessings of the Compassionate Lord be with you.

AMIN

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