

**Gratitude sermon at the Final Service for St Mark's College  
by the Chaplain, Rev'd Canon Steve Daughtry  
St Peter's Cathedral, Adelaide  
Saturday 26 October 2024**

I was on my phone earlier this week. We have a family Messenger group, usually concentrated on pictures of our grandchildren. My daughter-in-law, Laura, had put up a picture of my first son, Jesse, standing in the garden of their new home and holding their new, second son, Arthur, in his arms. It was a beautiful picture, and I typed in, "World's best dad" – as you do. Because I think he well might be! A little later, he responded with, "No U". In the grammar of text, three letters (N O U) that made me very proud and happy.

My children have always been very kind to me. They have always written me beautiful Father's Day, Birthday and other messages, letting me know they appreciate me as a dad. But now that my son is a dad, and is starting to discover just how interesting, wonderful and tricky that can be, it meant more to me that he still wanted to let me know that he valued me as a dad.

Because I have not been the world's best dad. Not at all. I have been all the things that many of your dads have been. Grumpy, work-obsessed, impatient, demanding, unkind, angry, unreliable....you name it and I've probably been it. I've been lots of good things as well, but being a parent is tough work. We all fail at it. Bear that in mind next time you think your folks are a bit lame. I'm not trying to make excuses for them or for me. Just trying to tell the truth.

And here's the thing. Even though I have been less than perfect, Jesse still lets me know that he values me as his dad. That he's grateful for me. With three letters in a text, he reshapes my view of myself and let's me know I matter.

That's the power of gratitude. It's transformational. It doesn't ignore the truth – because we all need to acknowledge the truth of our relationships and our past – but it overcomes the barriers of hurt, disappointment and grief, choosing to see what has been life-giving. In doing so, that gratitude becomes life-giving in itself. It can renew and resurrect relationships that could go the other way. Gratitude is a way of being in the world that releases and renews.

Take our first reading today. Joseph, as a young man, was almost murdered, and then sold into slavery by his brothers. Out of jealousy. Many years later he is reunited with them, in a situation where they are starving and need his help to survive, while he has almost unlimited power. Yet, instead of taking the revenge that was, justly, his due, he chooses to see the hand of God in their actions, enabling him to save them and reunite with his father and family. His willingness to embrace gratitude rather than enforce vengeance utterly transforms the situation. He goes on to embrace and cry with his terrified brothers, and he saves the whole family.

It's an extraordinary story. At it's heart is a desire to be in the world in a way that recognises goodness wherever it can be found, and to use that goodness to transform otherwise impossible situations.

In the portion of the Psalm Katrina read, the writer expresses deep gratitude to God for the way God lifts up the downtrodden and doesn't glory in victory, but in relationship. Again, it is a deep, tough and determined response that allows the writer to find the good in the world in which they lived. Because it was a tough world. It still is.

Cam read to us from the Gospel of Luke. In this section, the names of two women are mentioned. Mary Magdalene and Joanna. They are named as women who had been cured of 'demons' or illness, and who had chosen, once healed, not only to follow Jesus, but to provide for him and his followers from their own means.

There's a couple to things worth mentioning here. One, women were not very important in the society in which Jesus lived. Especially ill or demon-possessed women. Their problems were their own, self-inflicted problems. The assumption was that if you were possessed or ill, it was because you had done something wrong. No-one wanted anything to do with you. And yet the early Christian writers didn't shy away from mentioning the truth about these women. They weren't embarrassed by the fact these women were followers of Jesus – they celebrated them. These were 'broken' people who has been healed by Jesus. These women's lives had been transformed. And they responded by doing all they could to make it possible for Jesus to do this for even more people.

You may not know, but the Bible confirms that these two women were there when Jesus rose from the grave. They were the first witnesses of the Resurrection – the women, not the men – witnesses of a moment in time that has completely transformed the world. These women – once broken and shunned – became leaders of the early church. Respected and honoured.

Their gratitude to Jesus for what he did for them was mirrored in what they did for others. And in expressing that gratitude they were transformed once again, into powerful, recognised leaders, in a world that dishonoured women. I could really go on about this and the way the church has managed to ignore the leadership of women for far too long, but I'll spare you.

Gratitude is simply a response to others that is centred on giving thanks.

I recognise that sometimes it is hard to find anything to give thanks for. We all have days when thankfulness is a long way from where we are. But like many things, we can transform this through practice.

We can learn to be grateful, and to express gratitude.

Let's start with waking up. Not everyone did this morning. And it's a lovely day so it's not a bad place to start, being grateful for being alive. As Christians, many of us pray each morning and give thanks for what comes to mind and for those we will encounter. Even for those we struggle with. The simple act of giving thanks for someone who you really think is a bit of a pain in the arse can actually transform your attitude. It won't always, but it's a step forward, rather than back.

But let's talk about St Mark's and tonight and you and those you are sitting with.

Around you are people who have done good to you. And bad. Hopefully more of the former. Some have been there when you needed a shoulder to cry on. Others have been there when you needed a mate to have a good laugh with. Some have checked in with you when you wanted to hide away. Some have helped you study. Some have carried your secrets with fidelity. Some have saved you a seat at the table. Some have stepped out of their comfort zone and said hello and have become your friend. Some have wiped up your vomit and some have stepped in to stop you being a complete idiot.

And as you surreptitious look around to identify those people, there are others looking at you and knowing that you have been that person for them.

Tonight, some of you will be attending the final dinner for your final time. Others will be returning for another ride on the great St Mark's merry-go-round. So, tonight is a great time to be brave, be

willing to sound silly and to walk up to a few people and let them know just how grateful you are to them.

This is easy to do with your friends. Or, maybe not easy, but not very hard. But it's still worth doing. It's worth taking the risk of feeling like a fool in order to let your friends know that you're grateful to them. Because sometimes we forget to say anything. Or we think they already know. Or it's a bit – especially for the blokes – a bit vulnerable. But there's nothing like someone genuinely letting you know that you've been important to them.

And then there's those people who have made a real difference to you, but you don't know very well. People who have been inspirational or done something that gave you hope or courage or strength or determination. We're all inspired by people we don't really know. And often we think that they wouldn't really want to know us, because sometimes they seem too important too or distant. But here's the thing. They would like to know. They might be embarrassed – and you might be too – but you letting them know that you're grateful to them for that thing they did or said, will matter. No-one else might have said anything to them. They might think they stuffed up. You can transform that by being brave enough to say thanks.

And when should we start? How about on the walk back from this Cathedral? And right through the evening. There will be lots of chances to start. The best time for moments of gratitude is right now. Before we forget or get too scared. Front up. Say thanks. Be changed.

In the Gospel there was this passage.

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

Opportunities for gratitude come to us all, all the time. Learning to see them and choosing to respond is the hard part. But it gets easier as you try. Try to get rid of whatever 'birds' or 'rocks' or 'weeds' are preventing you from being a person who lets others know how much you value them. Let gratitude seep into the good soil of your heart. And grow.

God has blessed us with this beautiful, complex and challenging life. Let's use each day to transform each other through gratitude. Amen.