

## ***The Reset Button***

*Thanksgiving Sunday*

Text: Psalm 100; Psalm 124:8; Luke 17: 11-19

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November 20, 2016

*Holy One,  
whoever you are  
whatever you are  
wherever you are  
if you are (whether  
or not the verb "to be"  
may or may not  
apply to holiness  
beyond our comprehension) -  
in your sacred presence,  
in your holy absence,  
we stammer our gratitude.<sup>1</sup>*

**I love that last phrase: we stammer our gratitude.** But my goodness! That's not always an easy thing to do. And, of late, it has been an enormously confusing time – which makes it all the more difficult yet. A spirit of restlessness is afoot and it's hard to settle our hearts and minds.

And so all I want to do this morning, is simply this, to reach for and press the reset button with you. I want to call us out of all that is swirling around us, concerning us, baffling us – from crisis in the world such as it is to an angry divide in our own land. And I want to get us back, get us deeper, to the stammer of our gratitude.

So reach with me for the reset button. I want to push it for you and for me and lift us above and hold us high – because there are times when it's the only right and fitting thing to do in life. And a week of Thanksgiving is the best time, if ever there is. As I do so, two things come clear immediately.

**First is this basic truth and recognition: God is the Source and the Destiny of life – yours and mine.** I think sometimes we forget that. Really we do. Without even consciously knowing and scarce in awareness we fill life up with our own perspectives and assume our way supreme. And we mistake, we forget, we misconstrue our own part in the whole. And then, as if that is not enough, we make ourselves larger than we really are.

In the words of the brilliantly quotable Yogi Berra, "We made too many wrong mistakes along the way." (By the way, he also said, "I didn't really say everything I said!") And it is always a wrong mistake, double-negative forgiven, to forget that God is the Maker and Giver; the Creator and the Sustainer; and the Heart and Soul of the cosmos, and not we ourselves!

A friend of mine, a pastor here in Connecticut, was terribly bereft in the wake of our recent election. He has good reason. He is openly gay and has known the margins of discrimination first hand. The rhetoric of the campaign affected him deeply, still does, with its constant incivility and vitriol.

As he sat down to write his sermon last week he settled on the passage "our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." His words speak best here.<sup>2</sup> "That Psalm is a confession of faith both negative and positive — negative in that these words declare that we are unable to save ourselves, whether by good deeds or our good intentions . . . and yet positive as they testify to an ultimate trust in God, who made heaven and earth. They affirm that the "help" of God is, in fact, *our* help."

He continues, "and so with a great deal of weight and import behind them, these are the words that came to me Wednesday morning as I stood numb and in shock looking out over our backyard. *Our help is in the name of the Lord. Our help is in the name of the Lord. Our help is in the name of the Lord.*"

In the words of another Psalm that we spoke this morning: "God made us, and not we ourselves." This week, of all weeks, it's essential to remember that.

**I reach for the reset button again.** Because not only is it right and fitting to remember whose we are and the One who is the Source of and Destiny of life, but also this: to actually speak our gratitude out-loud as an essential practice to the well-being of life.

More to the point: "a void in us fills when we do that; when we say thank you."<sup>3</sup> We all know that feeling. There is some waiting space, some need in the human being, heart, mind and soul, that shifts deeper when we say it. So try it with me: "thank you." Say it again and touch your heart. And let's keep saying that until we really hear ourselves and the void fills.

The science of gratitude, about which we are so young in beginning to understand, teaches us this. "One of the quickest, most direct routes to restoring harmony and balance in our lives is to foster gratitude and appreciation. The moment that we shift from a mindset of negativity or of judgment to one of appreciation immediate effects can be detected in the body. Brain function becomes more balanced, harmonized and supple; heart rates shift to a more coherent and harmonious rhythm; and biochemical changes trigger a host of healthful responses."<sup>4</sup>

Or amp up the quantification! This is from the Wall Street Journal. "Gratitude is like a muscle. A number of studies confirm that the more we express our gratitude, the more grateful we become and the more we have a brighter outlook on life. In one study of high school students, those who showed the highest levels of gratitude had better GPA's, less depression, and less envy. A focus on materialism had just the opposite effect. An attitude of gratitude is a virtue that is more caught than taught."<sup>5</sup> And it can be learned and practiced by everyone!

Makes me think of that story we heard about Jesus and his healing of ten lepers. The ratio of response in gratitude was one in ten. And though Jesus always had such a wonderful way of teaching, maybe it's the one leper who is the teacher here. The one in ten, that is. The one who had well-exercised muscles of gratitude, and knew when and how to flex them!

**This, my dear friends, is all for today, all for this week, all for the rest of our lives.**  
And it is good and plenty enough.

So push reset with me, synchronize our hearts, realign our awareness. "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth."

May our first response, our middle response, our last response to that stammering truth be with the phrase that never grows old: "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

Let the people say: amen!

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<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Harper. Gratitude. Powder Horn Press, 2012, p. 62

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Emery, Senior Pastor, Storrs Congregational Church in a sermon titled "Promises, Promises" preached on November 13, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Charles H. Harper. Gratitude. Powder Horn Press, 2012, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Joel and Michelle Levey. "Understanding the Science of Gratitude. Huffington Post, July 19, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> "Gratitude Is Like a Muscle" in Wall Street Journal, December 23, 2013. Cited from secondary source: "Attitude of Gratitude" in Christian Century, January 22, 2014, p. 9.