



GOOD TIDINGS FROM ZION

Gratitude and the Brain

I bet if you look at Pastors' newsletter articles across churches and denominations during November, you'll find lots of articles on gratitude. I've probably written some myself. Coming up with ideas for newsletter articles can be hard and when a month gives you a holiday you can work with, you go with it.

Most of you will remember that 2018 was a very difficult year for me. Our son got sick at the end of 2017 and spent seven weeks in a hospital in Chicago and another month at Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha. He then stayed with us for another several months under home health care.

Both of my parents began experiencing a myriad of problems associated with being nearly 90, and my mom died in the summer of that same year. Another family crisis occurred in October.

By November, I was feeling pretty shelled. I decided to post some little thing I was grateful for every day for a while. I think maybe a month. It was very hard to be grateful in big ways. But I found I could find one ordinary thing I could be grateful for each day...things like the YMCA where I can exercise when the weather's bad, or the Bengal Spice Tea that I love. It seemed to be helpful to me, even though I couldn't find a way to feel grateful for much.

This month those posts have come up regularly as Facebook memories and it's been nice. I'm in a different place now, but I'll have to admit my default way of being in the world is not gratitude. When I do spontaneously experience gratitude, it feels like a blast of God's grace. But mostly it truly is something I have to practice.

In the last several years, I've read some things on gratitude and the brain. It's kind of big in pop psychology – in fact all sorts of things fall under what's often called "positive psychology." Gratitude is good for your brain, as well as your heart and soul. It releases dopamine, a so-called "feel good" neurotransmitter. Research studies have shown it can be helpful in people with anxiety and depression, in conjunction with other therapy.

Even in PTSD under the right circumstances it can be helpful. Severely traumatized people need psychotherapy and possibly medications. Encouraging them to be grateful can sometimes just trigger shame and guilt and make things worse. But a clinical trial showed that in conjunction with therapy, when they were ready, a group that practiced small expressions of gratitude did better overall than the groups that used therapy alone or therapy with journaling.

So, maybe in November, it would be good for me to try that again. I am grateful for lots of big things in my life, not least of which is God's ongoing grace and love for me. It's easy to take those things for granted. But sometimes expressing gratitude for the small ordinary things gets my brain and neurotransmitters more in the groove of being a grateful person.

By the way, I am really grateful today that I found my Bengal Spice Tea at Walmart after searching for it in vain at the two HyVee locations closest to us.

In Christ,

Pastor Kris

Worship is at 9 am Sundays, in person or online—or you can join us later on YouTube or on our Facebook page. Links to the bulletin, Facebook page, and YouTube channel can be found on our website:

<https://www.zionithaca.org/worship>

Calendar

- November 3** 9:00 am—Worship with Holy Communion
All Saints Sunday Remembrance
- November 10** 8:00 am—Council
12:45 pm—Shared Ministry Meeting at Grace
- November 17** 9:00 am—Worship
- November 24** 9:00 am—Worship with Holy Communion
- December 1** 9:00 am—Worship—no communion, Pastor Kris gone
First Sunday of Advent

Church school schedule continues every other Wednesday. Check with Carol for any holiday changes.

November Helpers

Cleaners—Cathy Hartshorn/Kim Fox
Usher—Merlin Fick/Aaron Nygren
Lector—Rine
Communion Asst.— Carol Mintzmeyer

Contact Information

Pastor Kris Bohac—402 499 4993
krisbo90@gmail.com
President Diane Rine—402.480.1483
Facebook—[Zion Lutheran Church ELCA](#)
Website—www.zionithaca.org