**Worship and thanksgiving**

Two days ago, the nation celebrated ANZAC Day, where we (New Zealanders and Australians) remembered the people of our countries who went overseas and fought for freedom in the world wars and Malaysia, and Korea and more recently Afghanistan. For those who came back but more about those who did not come back – killed in the service of our country.

The name ANZAC may be unfamiliar for some of you. It stands for Australia New Zealand Army Corp. They were the soldiers in World War 1 who had to attack the Turkish stronghold on Gallipoli. It was supposed to be a quick battle but it lasted months with our soldiers trapped beneath the cliffs at Gallipoli and the Turks raining fire down upon them, resulting in huge casualties. This has personal significance for me, because I had a great uncle die at Gallipoli. He died when he was 20 years old.

2779 NZ soldiers died and 5212 NZ soldiers were wounded there. The Gallipoli campaign was a costly failure for the Allies, with an estimated 135,000 allied troops killed or wounded.

World War 1 saw 98000 NZers going overseas to fight. Half the country’s men of military age and one-ninth of the total population. With a 58% casualty rate (death and wounded).

Death touched every family in NZ at that time so for the past 80 years we have come together at cenotaphs (war memorials) around the country at dawn, to remember and to thank those who went overseas and never returned, for their ultimate sacrifice. On ANZAC Day morning, shops are shut and the nation remembers.

This is not ancestor worship nor is it a glorification of war. It is a time of remembrance of the commitment of men and women to risk death for peace.

Given that theme of remembrance and thankfulness, today I want us to continue with our theme of worship. If you have missed the earlier messages about worship, they are on the church website.

Today I want to think of worship in relation to thankfulness and gratitude.

Worship and thanksgiving go hand in hand.

Worship with gratitude is a fundamental aspect of Christian life, where our hearts acknowledge God's sovereignty, goodness, and grace.

We express thankfulness to God through various forms of worship, including prayer, song, and acts of service.

Gratitude in worship is not merely an emotional response but a deliberate act of recognizing God's blessings and His work in our lives.

Gratitude in worship acknowledges God's ultimate authority and goodness. It shifts the focus from us to the Creator, fostering humility and dependence on God.

Gratitude is not a response to favourable circumstances but a recognition of God's unchanging nature and His work in all situations.

As we express gratitude, we align themselves with God's purposes and cultivate a heart of worship that is pleasing to Him.

Scripture, and particularly the praise songs called Psalms are full of remembering the goodness of God and being thankful to God. There are at least 30 psalms expressing gratitude to God.

There are psalms expressing thankfulness as a response to God’s goodness.

*I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old*. (Psalm 77:11)

*I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands*. (Psalm 143:5)

There are psalms expressing thankfulness in all circumstances: David who wrote them demonstrated that gratitude isn’t dependent on our circumstances but on God's character. Even during difficult times, David chose to praise and thank God, showing us that thankfulness is an attitude of the heart.

There are psalms expressing thankfulness as a form of worship

"*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name*." (Psalm 100:4)

And there are psalms expressing thankfulness amidst turbulent challenges

The apostle Paul is also well known for writing Scriptures about being thankful. Some of his most well-known passages are focused on gratitude, including giving thanks for all things whilst he suffered for his faith, even imprisonment under the sentence of death in Rome.

"*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*" (Philippians 4:6)

He says be thankful in all circumstances (Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18)

"*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

He says be thankful even in suffering (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:1-4), reminding us to be grateful for everything we have, even in difficult times.

He reminds us to do everything in the name of Jesus out of a spirit of gratefulness

"*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*." (Colossians 3:17)

By expressing gratitude, we can find joy and peace in our lives and strengthen our relationship with God.

Question: Do we ever pause and remember God’s faithfulness and God’s goodness and worship him because of that?

If someone were to ask you right now what you’re grateful for, would you be able to answer, without thinking too much? We often experience things that we should be grateful for, only to forget about them the next day.

Psalms 136:1 *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever.*

Or do we take for granted the blessings we have received, as if they were our right and our due, and forget to thank the one who made those blessings possible?

Think of the 10 lepers healed by Jesus, yet only one returned to thank Jesus.

Luke 17:17 *Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”* *19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”*

Through his gratitude the Samaritan leper received physical and spiritual healing.

We can look at our own lives in one of two ways. We can see everything we are and have as something we earned, something we built, something we deserve. Or we can see everything we are and have as enormous grace given to us by God.

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion to clarity. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow (Melody Beattie)[[1]](#footnote-1)

I am talking here about maintaining an attitude of gratitude in which we operate from a place of abundance instead of a place of scarcity and fear. Each of us always has a choice of what we will focus on.

In thanksgiving we give glory to God for what he has done for us; in praise, we give glory to God for whom he is in himself.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Grateful people give thanks for everything in their life, even on the days when it feels like nothing is going right.

Wayne Detzler wrote that “We do not always know what is right or which is the right path. But there is one word which should never be far from our lips. It is ‘thanks’ (1 Thess. 5:18).”[[3]](#footnote-3)

We can be quick to grumble and bemoan the state of our life, or the things that happen to us but as Samuel Logan Brengle in his book *Take Time to be Holy*, writes: “Truly, we have much to thank God for, but if we would be thankful, we must set our hearts to do it with a will. We grumble and complain without thought, but we must think to give thanks.” [[4]](#footnote-4)

He says that we need to be intentional in worshipping God through our gratitude. It does not happen by chance.

So often when things go in ways not to our liking, we forego praise and thankfulness.

John MacArthur reminds us: “Don’t complain when you’re in bad circumstances; cultivate a heart of thankfulness instead. If you’re not a thankful person, it’s because you think you deserve better circumstances than those you currently have. But if you got what you deserved, you’d be in hell. So be thankful for whatever God gives you. That will take all the sourness out of your life.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Yet even when things are going well and good things are happening to us, we also forget to be thankful.

Our lives should be one of thankfulness to God.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Think of the old song: give thanks with a grateful heart…

“Give thanks with a grateful heart

Give thanks to the Holy One

Give thanks because He’s given Jesus Christ, His Son”

Think of one of the songs we sing regularly here: Goodness of God.

“And all my life You have been faithful

And all my life You have been so, so good

With every breath that I am able

Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.”

Or 10,000 reasons by Matt Redman

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul

Worship His holy name

Sing like never before, O my soul

I’ll worship Your holy name.”

Karlene’s go-to song in her long health crisis has been “I Raise a Hallelujah”

I raise a hallelujah

In the presence of my enemies

I raise a hallelujah

Louder than the unbelief

I raise a hallelujah

My weapon is a melody

I raise a hallelujah

Heaven comes to fight for me

I'm gonna sing, in the middle of the storm

Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar

Up from the ashes, hope will arise

Death is defeated, the King is alive

Gratitude is a war cry. It is a weapon, reminding us that when we face the giants, the enemy will not beat us.

How many times do we come into a worship service and these songs of thankfulness are played, and we do not feel in that space to worship with thanks.

Gratitude in bad circumstances goes counter to our natural inclinations. But we are told to give thanks under every circumstance of life (Eph. 5:20). [[7]](#footnote-7) We need to fake it until we make it. As we start to praise God, we find that our souls will begin to feel lifted.

And thanklessness is a terrible disregard of God’s goodness.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Meister Eckhart wrote: If the only prayer you say in your whole life is “thank you”, that would suffice.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The results of thankfulness are many:

1. It is the way to true happiness

William Law in his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* writes: “If anyone would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and all perfection, he must tell you to make a rule to yourself to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Albert Einstein once commented that “there are 2 ways in which to live your life. One is that nothing is a miracle. They other is as thought everything is a miracle”.[[11]](#footnote-11)

1. It gives us the stamina and endurance to survive in an uncaring world.

Gratitude has a big job to do in us and our hearts. It is one of the chief ways that God infuses joy and resilience into the daily struggle of life.[[12]](#footnote-12) You cannot be grateful and unhappy at the same time.

1. It opens our eyes to the wonder of god’s creation around us.

As we walk by the seashore, gaze in wonder at the stars, or smell the fragrance of a flower, we sense God speaking to us through His creation. And, seeing Him, we worship and give thanks.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Ralph Waldo Emerson commented that “The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common”.[[14]](#footnote-14)

D H Lawrence: “O for the wonder that bubbles into my soul.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

1. There are health benefits to worshipping in thankfulness.

Worship has advantages for the whole person and the community, not only our spiritual well-being. Worship has many unexpected benefits, including lowering stress levels, improving mental health, strengthening social bonds, and fostering spiritual development. Worship promotes a more complete, meaningful existence by enhancing our entire well-being.

Recent scientific research indicates that positive emotions such as gratitude and love have beneficial effects on health, by strengthening and enhancing the immune system, the endorphins released stimulate dilation of the blood vessels which leads to a relaxed heart. As we count our blessings, we literally bathe ourselves inwardly in good hormones.[[16]](#footnote-16)

We tend to focus on what is wrong with our bodies but what if we gave thanks to God for what does not need healing. (Joan Borysenko)[[17]](#footnote-17)

Here is the challenge for us:

Infuse your worship with gratitude, whether in personal devotion, corporate gatherings, or moments of prayer.

Take intentional time to reflect on the blessings God has poured into your life—provision in times of need, peace in the storms, and joy in unexpected places.

Let these reflections kindle a fire of praise within you, lifting your worship to new heights.

Gratitude in worship not only magnifies God but also transforms your heart, aligning it with His will and filling it with His peace.

Enter His presence with thanksgiving, and watch as He meets you with His power, grace, and unshakable love.

Let the transformative power of gratitude in worship become the anthem of your heart, drawing you deeper into the presence of Almighty God.

Don’t keep this life-changing truth to yourself—boldly share it with others and inspire them to approach worship with hearts ablaze with thankfulness.

Together, let us celebrate the limitless goodness and glory of our Creator, proclaiming His greatness and unleashing His power to transform lives through worship. [[18]](#footnote-18)

Let’s pray:

Heavenly Father,

We come before You with hearts ablaze with gratitude, ready to exalt Your holy name in spirit and in truth. Thank You for Your unyielding love, Your immeasurable grace, and Your mercies that are new every morning. Open our eyes to see Your hand moving in every season, even in the trials, and ignite within us a response of unshakable thanksgiving. Let our worship thunder forth as a testament to Your faithfulness and glory, a reflection of all You have done and continue to do in power and love. We declare this in the mighty, victorious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.[[19]](#footnote-19)

1. M J Ryan *Attitudes of Gratitude 11* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Richard Foster *Prayer: finding the heart’s true home* 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wayne Detzler*, Living Words in Philippians* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Samuel Logan Brengle, *Take Time to be Holy* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. John MacArthur, *The Master’s Plan for the Church* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, vol. 5* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Al Detter, *Nelson’s Annual Preacher’s Sourcebook* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Lynn Garder, *What the Bible Says about Suffering* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ryan 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ryan 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *The Quiet Place* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Larry Richards, *The 365-Day Devotional Commentary* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ryan 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ryan 115 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ryan 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ryan 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *https://thechristianjourney.substack.com/p/gratitude-in-worship-a-response-to* [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *https://thechristianjourney.substack.com/p/gratitude-in-worship-a-response-to* [↑](#footnote-ref-19)