Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
--Philippians 4:4-7

Autumn may have officially arrived a month ago, but now we are beginning to feel it in cooler, wetter weather and shorter days. Even as we approach Halloween, the shops have moved on to Christmas in their merchandise displays if not yet their music.

We too look forward to Christmas, for many an important and joyful holiday, but even as we begin to think about beginning the preparations there are two liturgical seasons before we get there. We have the creatively named Season after Pentecost to carry us through the rest of October and December and Advent which begins on December 2 and carries us all the way to Christmas Eve.

You will hear more about Advent in the next newsletter, so for now let's talk about the remainder of the Season After Pentecost. In November, we will celebrate Thanksgiving, a day that we set aside to express gratitude, but I suggest that we extend that expression to the whole month of November. Gratitude, after all, has the capacity to encourage us and to increase our joy as it turns our focus to the blessings in our lives.

And so I challenge you to start a daily gratitude practice if you don't already have one. Each day in November do something to express your gratitude. Some ideas to start with:

1. Start a gratitude journal. Each day write in it what you are grateful for that day. It can be one thing or many things, as small or as large as makes sense for you that day.
2. Send a thank you note to someone who has touched your heart.
3. Create a gratitude jar. Each day write on slips of paper three things (or two or five or ? -- the number isn't magic) that you are grateful for and put them in the jar. At the end of the month, you will see the blessings adding up.
4. Adopt a gratitude stone. Find a nice stone or other object. Carry it with you each day in your pocket or purse, and each time you see it or touch it or feel the weight of its presence, take a moment to reflect on what you are grateful for. At the end of the day when you set the tone down, remember the moments of gratitude from the day.
5. Take a gratitude walk. Go for a walk and observe your surroundings and express gratitude for what you see, smell, hear, or feel.

During worship on the Sunday after Thanksgiving, the last Sunday in this season, we will have some time to reflect on gratitude. This will prepare us to enter into the season of Advent and the hope, peace, love, and joy that that season brings.

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