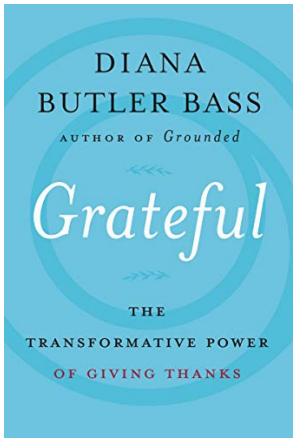
SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — October 5, 2025



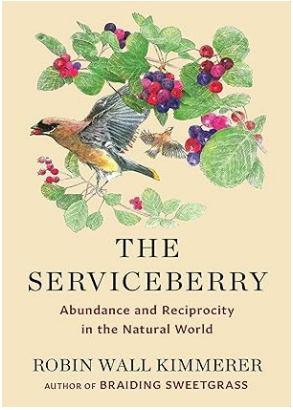
I begin with a story from a favorite book, Diana Butler Bass's *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks* (HarperOne, 2018). She tells the story of Pastor Jason, whose congregation helps he and his family survive a rare form of cancer. Pastor Jason gives thanks to them at that year's Thanksgiving worship service. Butler Bass ends the story by concluding: "Gratitude is social. It is about, as Pastor Jason learned, 'presence, participation, and partnership.' It is about being *with* one another, *in* life together. It is the thread of nature and neighbor, the seemingly fragile strands of gifts and goodness that weave our lives together."

It is fitting that a Gospel emphasizing gratitude is at the center of our journey to the cross in Luke's Gospel, where in Luke 12-19 we meet six rich men who are largely characterized by a thankless hoarding of wealth. They are the model of how *not* to enact God's economics in the world. The healed Samaritan man who had leprosy is the opposite. In returning to give thanks, he is the positive model for how to ground our participation in the coming of God's economics into the world through Jesus.

Gratitude also becomes essential in the face of the rising nationalistic economics that threaten any gains toward equality which humankind has achieved through democracy. Butler Bass starting writing this book as Donald Trump's campaign began in 2015. When he was elected in November 2016, she almost stop writing because she felt anything but grateful. But she realized that gratitude was ultimately be much more than a feeling. It needs to be a lifestyle choice that grounds all of our relationships with God, other people, and the world we live in. I highly recommend this book as basic to what we need to survive the rising tide of the thankless, fearful resentment which accompanies nationalistic movements — the latter a recipe for never-ending division and violence between peoples.

Gratitude is at the heart of the kind of community which heals divisiveness. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus left us this weekly sacrament that we share as the basis for our life together. We sometimes call it the *Eucharist*, from the Greek work for *giving thanks*. We remember that on the night before his crucifixion, he took bread and *gave thanks*, "This is my body given for you." He also took a cup of wine and *gave thanks*, "This is my blood poured out for you and all people for the forgiveness of debts. Do this in remembrance of me." What is the *do this*? Certainly, to share the sacrament itself each week. But surely also to *do* gratitude. To give thanks with our very lives. To be like the one of the ten lepers, who happened to be a Samaritan, falling at our Lord's feet so to speak, to live lives of gratefulness to God. Why? Because no matter what the nationalistic hoarders of wealth tell us, there is an *abundance* in God's creation, not a scarcity, *when* we learn to gratefully share it with our neighbors. Let us *do* gratitude in remembrance of Jesus.

Epilogue: another theme we've encountered throughout this middle section of Luke's Gospel is that the historical Jesus was an indigenous man in the Roman Empire. So the economics he teaches us from God are shaped by indigenous wisdom. If we wish to find similar approaches today, we do well to look to our indigenous neighbors. We will find that their approaches are also grounded in gratitude. Here's the one we've featured.



Excerpts from Robin Wall Kimmerer's *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World* **relating to gratitude**:

Inside front cover: As Indigenous scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer harvests Service-berries alongside the birds, she considers the ethic of reciprocity that lies at the heart of the gift economy. How, she asks, can we learn from Indigenous wisdom and the plant world to reimagine what we value most? Our economy is rooted in scarcity, competition, and the hoarding of resources, and we have surrendered our values to a system that actively harms what we love. Meanwhile, the Serviceberry's relationship with the natural world is an embodiment of interconnectedness and gratitude.

Pages 7-9: I can't help but gaze at [the serviceberries], these shiny gems, cupped in my hand — and breathe out my thanks. In the presence of such gifts, gratitude is the intuitive first response. This gratitude flows toward our plant elders and radiates to the rain, to the sunshine, to the improbability of bushes spangled with morsels of sweetness in a world that can be bitter.

In the Anishinaabe worldview, it's not just fruits that are understood as gifts, rather all of the sustenance that the land provides, from fish to firewood. Everything that makes our lives possible . . . it all comes from the Earth. When we speak of these not as things or natural resources or commodities, but as gifts, our whole relationship to the natural world changes. . . .

This kind of gratitude is so much more than a polite "thank you." Not an automatic ritual of "manners," but a recognition of indebtedness that can stop you in your tracks — it brings you the realization that your life is nurtured from the body of Mother Earth.

Pages 11-13: Many Indigenous Peoples, including my Anishinaabe relatives and my Haudenosaunee neighbors, inherit what is known as "a culture of gratitude," where lifeways are organized around recognition and responsibility for earthly gifts, both ceremonial and pragmatic. Our oldest teaching stories remind us that failure to show gratitude dishonors the gift and brings serious consequences. . . . Ecopsychologists have shown that the practice of gratitude puts brakes on hyper-consumption. The relationships nurtured by gift-thinking diminish our sense of scarcity and want. In that climate of sufficiency, our hunger for more abates and we take only what we need, in respect for the generosity of the giver. Climate catastrophe and biodiversity loss are the consequences of unrestrained taking by humans. Might cultivation of gratitude be part of the solution?

Pages 32-33, 34: The currency in a gift economy is relationship, which is expressed as gratitude, as interdependence and the ongoing cycles of reciprocity. A gift economy nurtures the community bonds that enhance mutual well-being; the economic unit is "we" rather than "I," as all flourishing is mutual. . .

In a gift economy, the currency in circulation is gratitude and connection rather than goods or money. A gift economy includes a system of social and moral agreements for indirect reciprocity, rather than a direct exchange. So, the hunter who shared the feast with you today could well anticipate that you would share from a full fishnet or offer your labor in repairing a boat in the future. The prosperity of the community grows from the flow of relationships, not the accumulation of goods.

Pages 74-75: Serviceberry teaches us another way to understand relationships and exchange. A Serviceberry economy as our model prompts the opportunity for articulation of the value of gratitude and reciprocity as essential foundations for an economy." Reciprocity — not scarcity.

As a participant in a traditional culture of gratitude, now with a bucket full of berries in my hand, I've never quite understood something about human economics, and that is the primacy of scarcity as an organizing principle.

As a person schooled by plants, my fingers stained with berry juice, I'm not willing to give scarcity such a prominent role. Gift economies arise from an understanding of earthly abundance and the gratitude it generates. A perception of abundance, based on the notion that there is enough if we share it, underlies economies of mutual support.

Pages 90-91, 92: I cherish the notion of the gift economy, that we might back away from the grinding system, which reduces everything to a commodity and leaves most of us bereft of what we really want: a sense of belonging and relationship and purpose and beauty, which can never be commoditized. I want to be part of a system in which wealth means having enough to share, and where the gratification of meeting your family needs is not poisoned by destroying that possibility for someone else. I want to live in a society where the currency of exchange is gratitude and the infinitely renewable resource of kindness, which multiplies every time it is shared rather than depreciating with use. . . .

I don't think market capitalism is going to vanish; the faceless institutions that benefit from it are too entrenched. The thieves are very powerful. But I don't think it's pie in the sky to imagine that we can create incentives to nurture a gift economy that runs right alongside the market economy. After all, what we crave is not trickle-down, faceless profits but reciprocal, face-to-face relationships, which are naturally abundant but made scarce by the anonymity of large-scale economics. We have the power to change that, to develop the local, reciprocal economies that serve community rather than undermine it.