



# Giving Growing Grateful

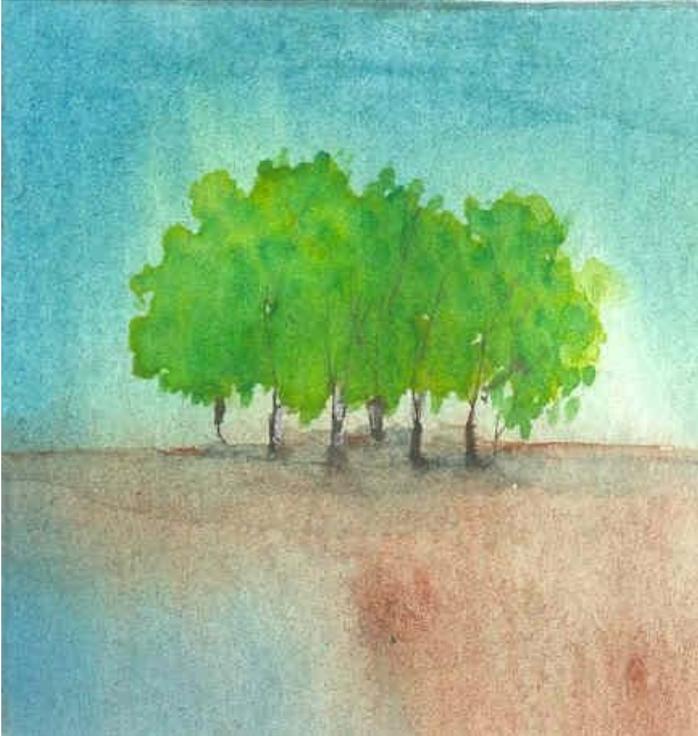
*A St. Mark's Stewardship Companion Devotional*

**St. Mark's Episcopal Church**

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**God, grant that my life be fertile ground  
for the blessings you provide.**

**When seeds of grace are sown by your hand let none  
fall aside.**

**Grant me the strength, I pray, to tend  
my field and set life's stones aside.**

**Lead me to reap my harvest without selfishness or pride,**

**And, with the guidance of your Holy Spirit  
share the blessings you provide.**

Allen Lowery

## Linds Don't Litter by Jennifer Lind

When my second son, Dalton, was a baby, I took a wonderful parenting class through **Love and Logic**, a popular organization dedicated to teaching parents common-sense methods for raising their kids to be healthy, responsible and kind adults. It really *was* quite logical, but I'd never have come up with any of the ideas we were taught by myself. In fact, I remember thinking I had done everything up to that point wrong with my older son, Keaton

One of the most influential lessons from the class was about giving our kids identities as a family. The example was, if you want your child not to litter, show them when they make a mistake and say, "Linds don't litter." It was a lesson my children learned to apply outside, by not inside my home.

To this day, Dalton "litters" snack wrappers everywhere and no amount of "Linds don't leave their orange peels or chip bags on the couch for their mother to pick up!" has had an impact. But, goodness, drop the tiniest slip of paper on the ground outside by accident and both boys are running after it yelling, "Linds don't litter!"

This lesson has worked for all kinds of things. We've talked about their dad being a third generation-alcoholic and how they must never ever drink – because this generation of Linds is going to be the one that changes. These Linds don't drink! These Linds don't smoke either. These Linds have good attitudes (who am I kidding, they're teen boys!?) and drive safely and give generously, and are good friends to others.... Whew! No pressure, Lind kids.

Still, if only a few of these lessons stick, they'll be better for it.

A companion story to this lesson has become a life lesson to me. It was a story about a grandmother who brought her 18-month-old grandson to church with her every week. She would help clean up the church after the services, picking up missed items and straightening prayer books. The little boy followed behind her everywhere she went and "helped" her as best he could. The whole time, the grandmother chatted to the toddler, saying things like, "Doesn't it feel good to help? It makes me so happy to do something to help the church and our friends."

I spent much time thinking on this story, in relation to many aspects of my life including my children, my work and my church. Once, I often referred to myself as “silly” or “dumb” when I made a mistake -- and my older son began to call me “dumb mommy.” I complained when I was the only parent who showed up to help at Sunday school or the only adult in our house that got up early with the kids. I rolled my eyes when my mother called on the phone to ask me to help her because she had to know how busy I was and how thoughtless it was that she didn’t offer to help ME.

This list can go on and on. There are so many things we do without a giving spirit. I’m sure I can find an example every day. Or I once could have.

I began small with a good attitude about myself, “Oh, how smart mommy is!” and “I love helping out at church,” with my two little boys constantly in tow. “I’m happy to help you,” I told my mom, or my tiny son, even when I didn’t exactly feel helping out or when I once again was getting up early with my little boys.

I made so many changes and positive statements that soon my little boys were bragging about their smart mommy and helping both me and my mom in their own ways. They even helped out at church. It did feel good - for all three of us. And it permanently changed the way I think.

I’ve always loved Marie Englebright’s humorous art and quotes. Around the same time, I received a gift of a calendar of her art and I found one that read, “If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change the way you think about it!” Notice, in the image (right) the child with her back to a window facing a brick wall and her paintings of flowers all over the walls. This seemed a building block for what I was doing in my and my children’s lives.

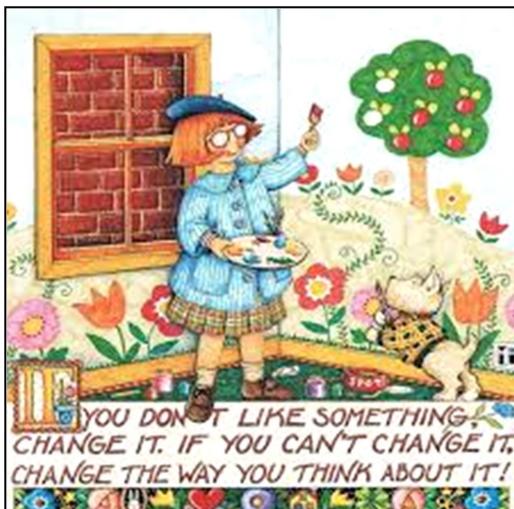
When I was hired at another church, a coworker emphasized that we are here to serve the congregation. That idea also resonated with me, and I later came to St. Mark’s with the same attitude, even if some days I don’t quite succeed.

Like my little family, we can make our church a part of our identity. Maybe we don’t say, and definitely shouldn’t say, “Christians

don't....” but I think there are many things that we do universally agree on and we should be saying. Things like...Christians give of their time, give to the poor, give to their church, feed the hungry, support the embattled, or are good stewards of the earth. There is plenty of inspiration from which to choose our own Christian identities and none of us would be wrong. When we choose our “Christians do \_\_\_\_\_” and do so with a sense of joy and gratitude, it becomes not a duty at all. Serving St. Mark’s in a staff position is that kind of joy for me. I have connection here with the staff and with many of our members that I feel goes beyond a job. It is such a joy to serve and give where I am needed and, nearly every day, I arrive with that joy firmly in place.

I may still have orange peels and chip bags on my couch, and I’ll continue to call Dalton back to pick them up—but with a smile and a joke for this growing child who is sweet in so many other ways. It is easier to help my mom, especially now that, at 89, she really needs me. I’m rarely woken by my boys any more, but I assure you I miss those early morning cuddles and pancakes on the stove - and I am more conscious of those times they do ask for help, now with math or the laundry machine or finding the peanut butter.

What are those things in your life that you can’t seem to change, but you can change how you think about them?



A decorative pink floral graphic with a white outline, partially overlapping the title and author's name.

# Growing

## Instant Prince by Harriet Cole

*“O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,  
reaching from one end to the other,  
mighty and sweetly ordering all things:  
Come and teach us the way of prudence.”*

There are times when wisdom means having a plan. Last February, when my husband Stretch and I returned to New Mexico we had a plan. We bought a house. With a pond (which may or may not have been prudent). After thirty years in Arizona, I knew about chlorine tabs, PH balances, algae blooms and dust storms. But cattails and lily pads? Gold fish? I needed help.

Google offered a company called the “Mud Monsters.” As they explained the process of caring for a pond, I glanced at Stretch. He’s a handyman and can deal with almost anything – except ponds. We hired two energetic and knowledgeable young men to sort out the vegetation and the fish. One of them soon reported that I had eight goldfish, at least three garter snakes and a rather large tadpole.

“Which means,” the other said as he rummaged through the cattails, “there must be a frog around here somewhere.”

I giggled. He wasn’t thinking about the Frog Prince story but I was. Guess what? The princess does not kiss her frog. He annoys and disgusts her into tossing him against the wall.

SPLAT!!! Instant prince. (Check out <https://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm001.html>).

I suspect that poor frog waited for his princess with the same desperation and frustration that I used to feel at the beginning of Advent. I couldn’t even think about the O Antiphons until I had posted my students’ final grades and kept my date with Handel’s *Messiah*.

Shortly after I started teaching, my Division Chair learned that I was a cellist as well as a storyteller. He soon asked me to join the orchestra for the college’s annual performance of the *Messiah*. It had been several years since I had played seriously, but he insisted that the performance was about college and community, not perfection. He would rather pay me than a random ASU music major.

The *Messiah* is rightly considered a masterpiece. It is also, for many reasons, a ‘cellist’s torture chamber. I practiced and learned the music,

but was never able to build up the stamina for a rehearsal and performance on the same day. Every year I told myself it would be wise to resign. But I didn't.

Last year's physically painful afternoon and evening turned out to be my final official participation in college events. It was also the year of the college's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I had listened to those stories all semester.

When various dreamers, educators, and community leaders approached the Maricopa Community College District Board to ask for a college in South Phoenix, the Board said "no." Nobody in "those" neighborhoods needed college! My Division Chair was involved in the battle that ultimately changed the Board's mind. As the head of the music department, he had an additional dream – an annual performance of the *Messiah* at South Mountain Community College. His colleagues from other colleges laughed at him. The people in "those" neighborhoods weren't interested in classical music.

So he went to the neighborhood churches and rounded up a volunteer choir (some of whom were still singing more than 30 years later). He bought music, hired a small orchestra, and held rehearsal. The SRO crowd that showed up for the first performance reappeared every subsequent year.

And every year a majority of the audience gathered at the stage door to thank and congratulate as many performers as possible. Until that last year, all the appreciation faintly embarrassed me. The memory of every wrong note haunted me, my back hurt and I wanted to go home.

But last December I realized that I knew many of the people outside that door. I had seen some of them, waiting for family members, every year. Some were fellow employees and students, current and former. The Division Chair was right! It was about community not perfection. And I was as much a member of that community, "those neighborhoods," as everybody else.

The antiphon asks Wisdom to come and teach us prudence. I'm not sure if I learned prudence – is it prudent to undertake an activity that causes frustration and physical pain – but I know I learned about community.

I hope, when you look at the Antiphons, that you find as much as I have.

## Resurrection by Anne Gordon Fritz



In this painting I have tried to joyfully express the love, hope, and joy of Jesus Christ for us, His People.

I have been inspired by many artists during my life. Marc Chagall, Paul Klee, Jean Miro, Salvador Dali, and of course Georgia O'Keeffe. Although I studied classical art, design, and architecture, I have always been drawn to the "Modernists." My spirit and soul delight in bright, light, and imperfectly drawn images.

The dove is a universal sign of Peace. The yellow is God's Glory, or, simply warm sunshine. The three olive branches

within the Cross signify the Vine and the olives are symbols of the sustenance Jesus gives us through His Body and Blood.

The Trinity is simply shown in the three fish – one swimming differently because we all are not alike. In the earliest of times when being a Christian was dangerous, an arc was drawn in the dusty earth, or sand, by a Christian upon meeting another person. That person, if a fellow Christian, would complete the fish shape signifying he, or she, too, was a Christian. Imagine needing to be so careful!

Although the Cross is often depicted as dark raw wood symbolizing the terrible death our Savior Jesus Christ experienced, I used the color turquoise to represent the water of Baptism giving us new life and the forgiveness of our sins.

The flames of Pentecost can also be seen as the divine feminine that religion is rooted within.

## The Wonder of God's Creation by Audrey Minard



## Wishing through Waiting by Erin Cook



“Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.”

- Psalm 25:5



## Grateful

### **Meditation by Pauline Artery**

Meditation does not top the list of what I consider my skill set; although, since the first part of May, an early morning walk with my dog, Wiggles, has become the best way to begin my day. Being quiet and aware of all creation has to offer has led to deepening gratitude and two-way conversation with God, which I think, is the definition of meditation. Still, when I think about knowing the presence of God, a short story is the best way for me to share a time when I Knew with all my heart that God was right there, with me.

In July of 1984, my almost seventy-six year old mother underwent open heart surgery at downtown Presbyterian hospital in Denver. Because of her age, being diabetic, and having taken a slew of medication for several years, the surgery lasted for over eight hours. What I remember from the conversation with her surgeon was that the it had taken so long because her heart muscle was the consistency of thick jello.

For the next seven and a half weeks, from eight in the morning until nine at night, my home-away-from-home became an ICU waiting room. The pay phone nearby became my lifeline to friends and family.

Details of the day's events on a particular evening probably four weeks in have been lost to time, but what I do remember is written on my heart. As usual, I was on the phone with my husband, or our priest, or maybe a best friend. It had been a tough day, and I was struggling not to attract attention with my sobs. I felt a hand on my shoulder, and as I turned to see a young woman standing there, she took my hand, lay a small silver cross in my palm, and closed my fingers over it. "Someone gave this to me awhile back, but I think you need it more than I do," she said as she turned and walked away. I have never been more sure that God was standing right beside me.

Yet, that's not the end of the story. Another family had come into ICU earlier that day. I knew from bits of conversation and the tear-streaked faces that their patient was critical, and I had been trying to give them the space they needed. When, I walked back into the waiting room, there sat the woman who had given me the cross, sitting with her Jewish family.

## **W.C. Sparrow in Song by Hans Stuart**



Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones,  
and give thanks to his holy name. (Psalm 30:4)

Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,  
my King and my God.

-Psalm 84:3

## Growth and Roots by Pat Catlett



If you feed them they will come! Hmmm.

Well tons of birds. Sitting quietly on the patio, I'm watching hummers, tiny gold finches, ladderback woodpeckers, robins, sparrows and common finches all happily feeding. Wow! And the garden is wildly green and so colorful with sunflowers, trumpet

vines, rose of Sharon, and all our other variety of roses at the most we've ever had bloom, along with sage, and wild larkspur, and 5' tall tomatoes in abundance, (because I over-planted...) I've never spent this much concentrated long term time working on our outdoor space. It has become a very welcome prayerful retreat.

The fruits of my labor can be simply peaceful contentment midst an ocean of chaos; a welcome respite of calm beauty.

I've been trying to sow those very seeds in my soul. Something different seems to be sprouting.

What an opportunity to be in this quarantine pandemic, and make other things grow. I realize that I am given precious time....to listen to what I hear, see what I am looking at, feel what I am touching, smell the roses, taste the fresh food, and begin to truly breathe again.

I know, that life is not always joyful or painless. It may be very bitter, insidiously heartbreaking, and just unbelievably crazy. Madness, I do not understand.

But, in this strange time, I have noticed there's a shift to my questions; and in my answers. I am trying to pay more attention.

Look into the garden you created in your Icon(s). Take the time. Sit. Be still. Light a candle, perhaps some incense. Place a cross. Arrange some flowers. Breathe. Pray. Perhaps you will find out what you really want...or need.

You may be very surprised. A gift, great or small is waiting.

### **St Simeon the God Receiver**

An Elder in the Synagogue, Simeon waited a very long time for the Messiah to be born. When Jesus was brought to the Temple for His 40 day blessing, Simone recognized the Savior, and the infant Jesus blessed him. Simeon seems like a benevolent grandfather to me... very comforting right now.



## Sandhill Cranes in Flight at Sunset by Hans Stuart



If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast. - Psalm 139:9-10

## Coffee Hour at Home by Erin Cook



“Your statutes have been  
my songs  
wherever I make  
my home.”  
- Psalm 119:54



**Got any rivers you can't cross over?**

**Got any mountains you can't tunnel through?**

**God specializes in things thought impossible**

**And, He can do what no other power  
can do.**

**-Allen Lowery**

## Contributors

Top Row (L-R): Allen Lowery, Harriet Coleman, Anne Gordon-Fritz

2nd Row: Pat Catlet, Pauline Artery (with husband John)

3rd Row: Audrey Minard (with husband Tom), Hans Stuart

4th Row: Erin Cook, Jennifer Lind (with sons Dalton and Keaton)

