

Slide 1: Good morning South Langley, it is a pleasure to be here. I am grateful to Rob for inviting me to come speak and also to be here with my brother in law is very special. Today is a unique Sunday as it is part of Thanksgiving weekend. I am sure all of you are eager to get out of here and be with your families. I promise to keep within the time I have been given.

Slide 2: I would like to give a brief introduction to who I am. I am Esther as you all know now, and I am a sister, daughter, niece, and granddaughter. I live in Abbotsford and I am currently working in my family business (Doerksen Music). I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree in biblical studies from CBC and a Master of Arts in Theological Studies degree from Regent College. This past year, I volunteer interned with Bridget Findlay program coordinator for Indigenous Neighbours, a program partnered with MCC. I am passionate about Indigenous studies, I love reading, watching movies, and spending time with my family and friends.

With Thanksgiving I'm sure on most of our minds, I would like to focus on gratitude in the light of Matthew 5:1-12. This portion of the gospel narrative is the start of the Sermon the Mount, specifically the Beatitudes. This sermon is covered in three chapters of Matthew and is the longest piece of teaching Jesus gives. There is much to be gleaned from these three chapters, however, I will be focusing on the first 12 verses in chapter 5. I am using the NRSV translation as my primary text and I will also read a portion of the text from the First Nations Version. Helmed by lead translator Terry Wildman, the FNV is an Indigenous English translation of scripture created to reflect North American Native oral storytelling traditions. Within the last year, MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) has hosted two notable events with Wildman where the FNV was read from and songs were sung based on FNV translations. I would encourage you all to look into the work behind this translation as it has helped me gain a fresh new perspective on reading scripture.

At the heart of my teaching today is this: sustainable gratitude embraces and embodies being human, even in the middle of mess. In much of Western culture, gratitude or thankfulness is often expressed as simply saying what I am thankful for one day a year, and in this way is fleeting and empty. When all of what it means to be human is fully embraced and embodied, gratitude can form deep roots thus growing empowered selves so when life is hard, challenging, and overwhelming, gratitude is still there. Gratitude is in "every breath". This is the way of following Jesus. I will first delve into the passage on hand and then I want to share a personal story that is relevant to gratitude embodying all of what it means to be human.

I would like to read Matthew 5:1-12 from the NRSV translation and I am also going to read the same section from the FNV.

Slide 3, 4, 5: NRSV

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled"
"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy"
"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God"
"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"
"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account"
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

FNV

1When Creator Sets Free (Jesus) saw this great crowd, he went back up into the mountainside and sat down to teach the people. His followers came to him there, 2so he took a deep breath, opened his mouth, and began to share his wisdom with them and teach them how to see Creator's good road.

BLESSINGS OF THE GOOD ROAD

3"Creator's blessing rests on the poor, the ones with broken spirits. The good road from above is theirs to walk.

4"Creator's blessing rests on the ones who walk a trail of tears, for he will wipe the tears from their eyes and comfort them.

5"Creator's blessing rests on the ones who walk softly and in a humble manner. The earth, land, and sky will welcome them and always be their home.

6"Creator's blessing rests on the ones who hunger and thirst for wrongs to be made right again. They will eat and drink until they are full.

7"Creator's blessing rests on the ones who are merciful and kind to others. Their kindness will find its way back to them—full circle.

8"Creator's blessing rests on the pure of heart. They are the ones who will see the Great Spirit.

9"Creator's blessing rests on the ones who make peace. It will be said of them, "They are the children of the Great Spirit!"

10"Creator's blessing rests on the ones who are hunted down and mistreated for doing what is right, for they are walking the good road from above.

11"Others will lie about you, speak against you, and look down on you with scorn and contempt, all because you walk the road with me. This is a sign that Creator's blessing is resting on you. 12So let your hearts be glad and jump for joy, for you will be honored in the spirit-world above. You are like the prophets of old, who were treated in the same way by your ancestors.

Slide 6: Notice how in the FNV, the word "Creator" is written before the blessed to indicate who is the one blessing. Creator is how Indigenous people identify God, for God is a God who creates. When blessing is recognized as a gift from Creator, the gratitude expressed reflects the depth and wholeness of Creator. These first 12 verses then moving to span three chapters, create a foundation for the rest of what Jesus is teaching. These initial 12 verses lay a groundwork for how to live and in living, embody all of being human. At

times being human means being vulnerable so more space is opened for learning and growth. Or at times means walking through severe hardship. Or perhaps being human means letting go of past versions of ourselves and embracing new versions. In a world that often celebrates ego, success, wealth, and the next best thing, Jesus's words remind readers and listeners it is often the people who are quieter, walk in humility, and are pushed down or taken for granted who Creator desires to bless. From the blessings follows gratitude for life in the lungs, in "every breath", and for Love who is with us forevermore.

N.T. Wright's commentary, *Matthew for Everyone*, suggests this portion of Jesus's teaching is centered in the announcement of a new covenant. "Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, and the peacemakers... the life of heaven – the life of the realm where God is already ruling – is to become the life of the world, transforming the present 'earth' into a place of beauty and delight that God always intended – they are a summons to live in the present way that will make sense in God's promised future – the future has arrived in the person of Jesus." The Roman occupation of this ancient context boasted power and prestige and wealth over simplicity, humility, and loving and caring for others. The highly revered religious leaders taught the scriptures were only for some, while others were deemed as not worthy or ineligible. Jesus turns all of what was known on its head: my way is for everyone; there are none who are excluded from my table, and being human means embracing and embodying every part and outflows gratitude. Gratitude becomes the natural outflow. Gratitude is in "every breath".

Writer, speaker, theologian, and former pastor Tim Mackie of *The Bible Project* observes from this passage, Jesus is speaking to a crowd of mainly poor and sick people and whose land had been forcibly taken. The weight of the Roman occupation with heavy taxation and loss of livelihood was not lost on Jesus, he also lived under the oppression. So Jesus begins to reveal a new reality: where love is at the centre, all are welcome at Creator God's feasting table, and from what we have been given, we in turn give to others; gratitude flows out. Those who were seen as less than, or marginalized, oppressed, forced to submit to abusive power, will be the ones who are at the center of the new creation. The way of Jesus is not pushing others down for the sake of my own interests, or making choices with ripple effects causing harm to others, it's not an "us and them" ideology. Jesus's new creation, in the words from Micah 6:8, is 'act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God'. I am presented with countless opportunities to embody gratitude by knowing I am empowered by Creator's love to love him, and to love my neighbour as I love myself. I am grateful for what has been given to me and I can fill my neighbour with the same love and gratitude for life. In this way, I am revealing more of the new creation that is to come. Gratitude in this way is not empty or fleeting, it is embodied and is in every breath.

Slide 7: Each type of person mentioned in these twelve verses, emphasizes the characteristics Jesus notices in how people are and behave. He notices these characteristics are ones that are willing to embody and embrace being human. The first is poor in spirit (could be likened to mental illness in our modern day), second is those who mourn, then meek (gentleness, humble), and then those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (seekers of justice), merciful, pure in heart (absence of ulterior motives), peacemakers, and then those who are persecuted because they follow the way of Jesus. Often these

personalities are not highly valued in culture, or perhaps stereotyped, and stigmatized. I think of my two brothers who live with Fragile X syndrome and autism both with limited motor skills and communication. Yet both of my brothers embody love, grace, and humility in ways not found in many. With the ever increasing polarization of politics, liberal vs. conservative agenda's, land rights, climate crisis, etc. etc. the people who often take up the spotlight are often the ones who have lots to say and often at a high volume. So what about those who are disabled? Or live with mental illness? Or prefer silence over noise? Or who are committed to non-violent approaches in political spaces? Or even in faith communities? South Langley is part of the Mennonite Brethren, often the label of peacemaker is not always viewed as desirable. The way of Jesus is one paved for all to walk, especially those who embody and embrace the qualities of being human that might often go unnoticed, unacknowledged or and unappreciated. The roots of sustainable gratitude bear fruit when all of being human is embraced and embodied as we follow the way of Jesus.

Slide 8: I want to move into a personal story that reflects sustainable gratitude embraces and embodies being human, even in the middle of mess. As I am sure many of you know, my Dad, Brian Doerksen, died on Tuesday, July 21, 2026. The long and arduous road of his illness started this past February, leading to continued trips to the ER in Abbotsford, eventually spending over a week at St. Paul's hospital in Vancouver, to finally taking his last breath surrounded by family in his childhood home. Almost every minute of Dad's illness caused pain, at times fully debilitating. I remember days turned into weeks and then months of endless pain with little to no answers to what was causing it. I remember at times looking into Dad's face and although a smile would be on his lips, the pain was always in his eyes. The feeling of hopelessness mixed with tinges of hope came in waves during the over 6 month period. When the decision was made to have Dad admitted into St. Paul's, the palliative care team there did everything that could be done to ease the pain. It was during this stay in the hospital, I and members of my family and friends of Dad witnessed something quite extraordinary: we witnessed gratitude embodied in the person of Dad. Each time a nurse, a doctor, a specialist, the hospital chaplain, any other hospital staff, and friends and family who came to visit with him and whenever a nurse or doctor performed a necessary medical procedure, the one word Dad would say over and over again was "thank you". He embodied a form of gratitude that went beyond the surface; gratitude was in his bones. I am not saying he did not have his moments where frustration, despair, and anger over no answers as to what was happening in his body, at the end of the day, he embodied gratitude. I remember right until the last moment of his earthly life, Dad would look into the eyes of all who were near him and in the moments of lucidness, the words "thank you" and "I love you" flowed continuously from his lips.

Slide 9: To end off my time, I want to share about a project that, ended up being the last project Dad completed. In a somewhat fitting fashion, his last album, titled *Breathing*, is a collection of songs for those with trouble sleeping and anxiety. One song on the album is titled, "Gratitude (Every Breath)". The chorus is as follows:

"For the love in my life... the life in my lungs
Every breath says thank you

Every breath says thank you”

The words, “thank you” are repeated multiple times in this song and even though there was no definite indication of death till close to the end of Dad’s life, the words he wrote became his final words for life – embody gratitude in and through all of life. When life is messy and hard to move through, often gratitude is the last thing I want to acknowledge or express. Being real and vulnerable about my hard emotions is what I need to do first before I can move into gratitude, otherwise the gratitude lacks sincerity.