

# A Grateful Fellowship

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I think that's symbolism this morning of us being a grateful church congregation of a church family of where we join our prayers together actually all linked in and so thinking about that in this as we go through this series on gratitude the gratitude of being a great fellowship I was grasped by this book it's called the boy the mole the fox and the horse I don't know whether you've read it or maybe at Christmas you saw the animation version now I think obviously it's written and drawn by Charlie McCaskey who is a Christian because in the essence there is a biblical imperative in this story how four different characters meet together and become one they become gathered and they support and they encourage one another and then amongst the beautiful illustrations that's in here there is a line that grabbed me and what grabbed me was when the mole who is played by Tom Hollander yeah over voices that and he says to the boy what do you want to be when you grow up and the boy says kind here's a little clip to remind you what do you want to be when you grow up kind hmm

I remember there was a word that we had here many years ago it was when Donna was here Donna had a word one morning as we were thinking about what does it mean to be church and she had very strong sense of this word of just be kind be kind and throughout the reading Paul reminds this people of this earlier church an early church that's finding its way in discipleship finding its way of being followers of Jesus of how to encourage themselves so our scripture this morning is almost imperative as therefore as God's chosen people holy and dearly loved there's an essential element in that I think in our discipleship of being one of knowing that you are chosen that you are holy and that you are dearly loved by God it's an essential element in our discipleship to know that because we need to know that because that is a part of us where we can receive and be open and know that the Holy Spirit is moving in us and through it it's an essential element of our theme today of being grateful how do we do that?

we clothe ourselves with compassion kindness humility gentleness and patience you spot those characteristics don't you in people you know if we were writing a post profile as often we get in for a job application maybe you're writing that or you're applying for a job application you have the two things don't you you know what is essential and what is desirable I'm not going to answer that question for you this morning I'm going to ask you as you think of yourself in your discipleship as part of this fellowship what of those elements for you are essential what do you think are desirable?

maybe you need more of something maybe I need more compassion maybe I need a sense of being more kind maybe I need humility maybe I need to be a little more gentle in the way I approach things Paul lays it out here as apprentices of Jesus he is looking to a church that wants to mature and grow not just as individuals although I think the word that was given to us this morning by Emily was so true I mean you know that thing of it's God in us and through us but that brings something important to the community for which we belong because people look at the community as well as us as individuals you know compassion kindness humility gentleness and patience following Jesus and I hope I don't want to break a myth here but it's not a hobby you know if coming here is a hobby maybe just rearrange and think again because in here this is it's not something like the golf club the pub the gym

Jesus says come and follow me come and follow me and sometimes that means as we know from the Bible we know from our own lives that means dropping something leaving something behind maybe old ways old character traits maybe ideas that we've had from the past that have got in the way but this whole freedom that we can leave something behind drop it and follow Jesus as disciples or apprentices I like that idea of apprentices if you're an apprentice an apprenticeship doesn't end with a certificate you keep on learning for those of you who are training apprentices you will know that it's an ongoing daily thing bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone forgive as the Lord forgave you it's an important element of who we are as community you know what a beautiful picture of God's godly Jesus centred community that we can do that that we can come that we can say we're sorry we can move on

[ 6 : 13 ] I'm not having a good day this wasn't my finest hour I'm sorry let's move on get it let's go and over all these virtues put on love which binds them together in perfect unity the thing you know we sing that song where I always think it's a bit of swing your pants job isn't it bind us together Lord bind us together you know but it's so true why did they put it to such a cheesy song it was but binding us together that sense that love that pulls us which is the common denominator by which people engage with us there is a church that's kind there is a group of people that are kind there's a people that love me there's a people where I can be myself in this season in the year I get requests for references filling my inbox I am so pleased there are people who want to serve from this congregation out on various camps whether it's out on explorer camps falcon camps spree wherever it's a wonderful thing because in the question you are asked to read in that role specification

I have to ask myself does the role specification that they're asking for match the person that I know you know and I'm glad I have to say it's yes it's yes don't give up serving and sharing but I'm so pleased when I do that because you look at that and you think that is the person that I know that is the person who longs to serve who goes out and wants to serve others many of you may have applied for the job or have had to prepare an advert of job description and these two things essential or desirable essential absolutely necessary extremely important and desirable skills experience that an employer would prefer essential criteria is the qualifications if I asked you to write a job description being a member of this church for yourself what would you write would it be that I just do a job

I do this I serve as important as it is or actually do I write that because of my character and everything in this scripture this morning I'm not going to ask you to do that now but you may want to think about it as you reread this thing what is it that defines me is it actually what I do or how I live my life as a disciple that brings a richness to the fellowship we can all fill posts and I'd love you to fill even more but it is about how we come in our character and how we serve this is what he's saying to an early church that it's going to evolve and it's going to grow you know we can all do church but I think Paul goes deeper because what does it mean to be church as a disciple you know I can do church but what does it mean to be because each of us are known and loved by God and the richness that each of us bring and what we bring is so essential to the fellowship that makes up this wonderful body the richness of knowing we are God's chosen people and that's the issue for many people they never grasp that they are known and loved by God and if that is us this morning if that is you know that you are known and loved by God it's a relational thing it's not just on paper and when we gather to give thanks to God it's not only in the completed work of Jesus on the cross it is what is the Holy Spirit continuing to do through us because maybe your prayer the same as mine each day is Lord stir up the gifts in me because you haven't finished working with me there's still things to do there's still lots that I want to learn and lots that

I can do for you the work isn't finished folks therefore every time we meet together and thank him as we've done this morning for what he has done and continues to do in us there's even more are we on to slide two I think we are that's great the thing is bear with one another I heard somebody once say to me oh well that's it I've reached this age I can give up now I don't remember doing that I don't even remember saying that in the gospel or saying that anyway at all in the richness that each of us have to bring in each season of our lives is so important through our experience that we bring to the body so having these qualities compassion kindness humility gentleness and patience which one of these do you think is an essential or a desirable or is it both Paul isn't just writing to an embryonic gathering you know we are one body that's what it says we are one body

I may offend some people here but being a Christian isn't the same as being a disciple sorry if that upsets you I can tick a box on a form to say I am a Christian but it doesn't mean to say that I'm living a disciplined life the difference is we are long to live a disciplined life and being discipleship is when Jesus calls it's the difference because we are intentional about keeping our focus on Jesus that's the intentional thing about being a disciple you know I recall in my curacy how the church had placed one of its priorities on growing children and families in a church that hadn't seen children and families for years I remember that on a Wednesday we grew a toddler church it far outgrew the size of the church on the morning on a Sunday morning you know in bless him my dear old vicar said you know his line was you can't change anything because the people wouldn't like it

[ 12 : 44 ] I remember that morning when a family came had made that transition and made that huge step to come to a Sunday morning toddler by definitions do what they say they toddle and they toddle all around the place to be part of a gracious and loving church means that we welcome people as they come to which one lady stood up very loudly and said for God's sake will you shut that child up it happened it happened the issue I think we have here in amongst all of this is are we a grateful fellowship fellowship that we welcome everyone as they come to stir up the gifts to bring something as Paul is talking about here a grateful fellowship what she didn't realise is the person who that morning hadn't really got the plot was compassion because the mum was a single mum with three under fives kindness her husband had just walked out and cleared the bank account humility she had said to me

I'm not sure I'm even good enough to come to church gentleness what she was seeking because she was reeling from the result of an abusive partner patience isn't what she received on that day so often people we think of church fellowship we should be more shaped like Jesus yes slide three if we're not there already that's great I'm not giving you my view on this because all of us search our hearts and lives but we are asked to bear with each other forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone forgive as the Lord forgave you and I think that's a great starting point as Paul gives this and over all these things put on love put on love clothe yourself in it cover yourself in it again and again what does love look like in the face of being a disciple the confidence

I find in the scripture is when Jesus called and invited each of us by name the different the radical thing was in this reading is if you understand what discipleship actually means is that in the culture you had to be the best of the best of the best to be accepted by the rabbi you spent ages going through learning the Torah doing everything you could and then if you were good enough and you had passed the test then you became a disciple of your rabbi the radical thing about Jesus' teaching that everybody got was that that wasn't the case that Jesus chose people who were rough and ready who were fishermen who followed him dropped everything because they saw something in Jesus and they were accepted and loved and wanted to be more there's that great rabbinic thing may you be covered by the dust of your rabbi you want to be so close to him that you want to learn that is discipleship and that what's that's what makes and contributes towards a grateful fellowship because we all know that we're walking so close to

Jesus in learning and what we're doing let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace and be thankful are we thankful this morning for our discipleship you know if you walk into a fellowship or setting and you aren't at one in peace then you need to know that peace maybe you're sensing that this morning maybe with what you've come but you sense a peace that you can take back out into the world to share with the people that we're going to share this week with that's what fellowship is all about and let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms hymns and songs from the spirit singing to God with gratitude in your hearts we are called as Jesus called as disciples and you know I've heard the line the same as you have you know I can be a

Christian and not go to church have you heard that line from people you know I actually agree with it yeah you can be a Christian and not go to church I can't be a disciple though because in a disciple in a gathering church in a gathered congregation we need one another I need people I need people who can be honest with me who can hold me to account when I slip I need people that I can say come on that's a good friend isn't it someone who can say to you truly truly truly come on back is this a good idea wisdom that's what brings a community together that we can encourage and enthuse and excite and build each other up stir up the gifts in the power of the Holy Spirit you know I don't get my wisdom from the news I don't get my wisdom from the paper I get my wisdom from scripture and from being part of a gathered church do we have a thankful gratitude for our fellowship so a lady visited over

[ 18 : 48 ] Christmas and she said you are so blessed here she said we have no musicians in our church we have recorded tracks that we sing along to every Sunday she said you are so blessed with the music that you have to worship with amen amen you know and whatever you do whether in word or deed do it in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him whatever you do whatever you do give thanks I don't know about you but the highlights of my membership of this church as a fellow member with you here is seeing people come to Christ I love to see people on their discipleship journey growing deeper and deeper in love with Jesus on the Alpha course at the moment I'm just so excited to see people coming in fellowship the boy the mole the fox and the horse the fox is right out on the edge he's a predator he his initial thing is he just wants to get to the mole and the boy presumably to harm them the fox then gets caught in a snare and the mole courageously as the fox says to him if I wasn't in this snare

I would kill you the mole says to the fox if you say in that snare you will die and courageously bites through the cable so that the fox can be free the fox realises what it means to be part of community to be loved and to be known Father God I pray that you would draw us more and more into a transformed love as a fellowship that those that are searching that those that will discover that those that you are drawing to us will know that they are loved by you and find that love for themselves and that we would grow more and more into that shape of a disciplined fellowship with compassion kindness humility gentleness patience and love

Holy Spirit would you come would you come and stir up the gifts in us we pray and would you draw those to us Lord who are seeking you in a disciplined walk with you in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen