

“Find a Way to Be Grateful for It All”
Dianne M. Daniels; UUCN, November 30, 2025

Sermon: “Find a Way to Be Grateful for It All” by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels

Good morning, beloveds.

It is a joy to be with you again in this sacred space - to feel your energy, to see your faces, to be part of this living, breathing community, in person and online.

I want to begin our service this morning with a poem that asks an important question: For What Shall We Give Thanks? By Rev. Laura Horton-Ludwig.

The wheel of the year has turned again.
Once more, the Thanksgiving season has arrived.

How shall we sing our song of gratitude now?
For what shall we give thanks?
For this moment, for friends near and far, for our breath.

For love; for courage and clarity; for strength; for delight.
For laughter; for beauty.
For the tables ‘round which we gather.

For the food we enjoy with friends,
seasoned with love and memory.

For the sun, the moon, and the stars in the sky.
For the trees that have seen so much and still stand proud, stretching themselves to the sky.

For the bright voices of children.
For the wisdom of elders, for actions that bless the world.

For hard work that makes a difference,

for music and art and celebration, for generosity.

For compassion; for endurance; for joy; for hope.
For all these things, we give thanks.

We have spent the month of November exploring gratitude from several angles — gratitude as a practice, gratitude as awareness, gratitude as resilience. And now, as we bring our month-long reflection to a close, I want to take us just a little deeper — into the invitation to find a way to be grateful for it all.

Not grateful only when things are good.
Not grateful only when life goes according to plan.
Not grateful only when the blessings are easy to name.

But grateful for all of it — the sweetness and the struggle, the comfort and the challenge, the joy that lifts us up and the difficulties that stretch us into who we are still becoming.

The reason is simple on the surface, and profoundly complex underneath: Gratitude isn't just a feeling. It's a way of living.

Being grateful is often momentary — a brief thank-you when something nice happens — but living gratefully is an ongoing orientation toward life itself, “a lens through which you view the world...regardless of circumstances.”

That distinction matters.

Because if gratitude depends on what's happening around us, then gratitude becomes fragile — easily disrupted by stress, heartbreak, illness, financial strain, or political turmoil.

But when gratitude becomes a way of being, it helps us build an inner foundation — a sturdiness and a strength — that can weather life's storms.

I want to emphasize some powerful and consistent benefits:

Gratitude literally changes the brain — increasing dopamine and serotonin, the “feel good” hormones that help us feel calmer and happier.

Gratitude builds resilience — helping us reinterpret setbacks not as failures, but as opportunities for growth.

Gratitude nurtures emotional wellness and helps us navigate stress with more clarity and less reactivity.

Gratitude opens the door to peace and contentment — not because life is perfect, but because gratitude shifts the way we relate to our lived experiences.

The message is clear: Gratitude is not a denial of reality. It is a deeper awareness of it.

And this is where Unitarian Universalism’s values — especially Love, Transformation, Interdependence, Generosity, and Justice — give us tools for living a gratitude that is honest, courageous, and sustaining.

UU gratitude must be big enough to hold truth.

It must be spacious enough to acknowledge pain.

And it must be strong enough to anchor us when circumstances change.

SO WHAT — Why This Matters, Especially When Life Is Hard

It’s one thing to talk about gratitude when we feel good, when life is unfolding the way we hoped, when the blessings are obvious.

But what about the rest of the time?

What about the diagnoses no one wanted?

The job loss that came at the worst time?

The grief that sits in the center of the chest and does not move?

The complicated family dynamics that resurface every holiday season?

The headlines that keep us awake at night?

How, during all that, are we supposed to “be grateful for it all”?

This is where the deeper work begins.

The power of gratitude — real, lived gratitude — is not that it magically fixes the hard things. The power of gratitude is that it reshapes us **while** we navigate the hard things.

Gratitude activates our parasympathetic nervous system — the part of that allows us to calm down, breathe deeply, and regain clarity. It helps the body shift out of fight-or-flight mode so we can respond thoughtfully rather than react from fear.

In other words: Gratitude doesn't remove stress, but it gives us more tools to meet it.

Gratitude also builds resilience. When we repeatedly practice noticing the small, good things — even when, and perhaps especially when they're tiny — we train our brain to seek out hope, possibility, and meaning. Over time, we cultivate a growth mindset: a belief that, even in difficulty, we can learn, stretch, heal, and adapt.

Gratitude also helps reduce emotional triggers — not by pretending they don't exist, but by grounding us in what is good, supportive, present, and true right now.

Think of gratitude like a lighthouse:
It doesn't remove the storm.
It doesn't calm the waves.
It doesn't shorten the distance to shore.

But it gives us a fixed point to orient toward.
It gives us a way to steady ourselves.
It reminds us that there is a path through the dark.

And here's the deeper truth — the one that may be challenging but is profoundly liberating:

Sometimes gratitude grows most powerfully in the very moments we would never have chosen.

Sometimes the hardest season becomes the one that reveals what truly matters.

Sometimes loss opens us to a depth of compassion we never knew we had.

Sometimes struggle uncovers strengths we didn't know were in us.

Sometimes disappointment redirects us toward a path more aligned with who we truly are.

Sometimes grief enlarges our hearts and binds us more tightly to one another.

This is not about silver-lining everything. It's about recognizing that even the difficult things can shape us in ways that matter.

Gratitude encourages “a sense of inner rest...a sense of peace” that comes from valuing what we have and gaining perspective about what is hard or what could be worse.

Gratitude helps us:

- Live more fully in the moment
- Appreciate simple blessings
- Reflect on what life has taught us
- Recognize the growth we've earned
- Celebrate how far we've come
- Acknowledge the people who have supported us

And perhaps most importantly: Gratitude helps us choose who we will be in the face of life's complexity.

In the language of our UU values, this is Transformation — the spiritual practice of becoming.

And the grateful life is a transformed life — not because everything is easy, but because everything is meaningful.

NOW WHAT — How Do We Actually Practice Gratitude for It All?

This is where we can focus on the practices that will help you build gratitude into your life from this day forward.

Here are some concrete, spirit-centered, psychologically grounded practices, structured around UU values, to help you do just that.

1. Practice Daily Micro-Gratitudes (For UU Values: Love & Transformation)

I want to encourage you to adopt a 60-second gratitude ritual at the beginning or end of your day:

- One thing that brought you joy
- One thing that was difficult
- One thing that helped you grow

Not “three good things.” But “three real things.” This helps gratitude hold the fullness of life — not just the positive.

2. Reframe Hard Moments Using Loving Awareness (For UU Values: Justice & Interdependence)

When something difficult happens:

Pause. Breathe – at least one deep breath, and more if you need them.

Ask: What is this moment trying to teach me? Who can support me?

Where is the strength in me that can meet this?

Gratitude builds resilience and encourages a growth mindset.

This is not about blaming yourself for pain — it’s about empowering yourself within it.

3. Write a “Gratitude Letter” You May Never Send (For UU Values: Generosity & Love)

Research shows that gratitude letters — even when unsent — provide healing, clarity, and emotional release.

I invite you to write:

- To someone who helped them
- To someone they miss
- To someone they are struggling with
- To themselves

Gratitude letters help us integrate emotion, find closure, and replenish compassion.

4. Look for Growth in Your Own Story

(For UU Values: Transformation)

Invite your people to reflect:

- “What have I survived?”
- “What wisdom did that season give me?”
- “Who did I become because of that struggle?”

Gratitude is not about denying hardship — it is about reclaiming power from hardship.

5. Build a Gratitude Practice That Includes Your Physical Body

(For UU Values: Interdependence & Love)

We can express gratitude for our bodies to build self-esteem and reduce stress.

Encourage practices like:

- Hand over heart breathing
- Holding a warm mug
- Standing in sunlight for one minute
- Taking a gratitude walk
- Naming three things your body made possible today

The body helps anchor gratitude when the mind is overwhelmed.

6. Use Gratitude to Interrupt Overwhelm

(For UU Values: Equity & Pluralism)

When stress rises, perhaps after you practice the reframing we mentioned earlier with intentional deep breathing, ask:

- What is one thing that is okay right now?
- What is one thing I can be thankful for in this moment?
- What is one resource, person, or truth that supports me?

This is mindfulness-based gratitude— grounding, regulating, and clarifying.

7. Practice Collective Gratitude

(For UU Values: Interdependence & Community)

Encourage congregants to:

- Express gratitude out loud to each other
- Share expressions of gratitude at dinner or in meetings
- Acknowledge helpers and caregivers
- Thank someone who often goes unnoticed

When gratitude is shared, community deepens.

Closing Reflection for Sermon: A Courageous Gratitude

Beloveds, gratitude is not a shallow positivity.

It is not wishful thinking.

It is not pretending everything is fine.

It is a courageous spiritual practice.

A practice rooted in Love, sustained by Interdependence.

Shaped by Transformation, expressed through Generosity.

Guided by Justice, open to Pluralism — many paths, many truths.

And a practice centered on the sacredness of life itself.

To “find a way to be grateful for it all” means:

We honor joy, fully.

We acknowledge pain honestly.

We hold both as part of the sacred story of being human.

Gratitude is not only a reaction.

It is a relationship.

A relationship with life, truth, our own unfolding, and with Love at the center of everything.

May we practice gratitude with courage and honesty.

May we practice gratitude with humility and generosity.

May we practice gratitude with Love.

And may gratitude — real, embodied, grounded gratitude — help us find peace, hope, resilience, and purpose in all of it...

Yes, even that part, this moment, even the things we do not yet understand.

May it ever be so. And may we make it so.

Amen. Ase. Blessed be.

Closing Hymn: #395 – Sing and Rejoice (in rounds)

<https://youtu.be/oRTKClAVWow?si=lh8zUDKmFPLddjQt>

**Closing Words – Finding Gratitude in the Whole Journey – by
Rev. Dianne M. Daniels**

As we leave this sacred time,

May the breath you take in this moment remind you that you are alive,
growing, and becoming.

May gratitude rise gently within you—

not as pressure, not as perfection,

but as a steady, quiet companion walking with you through whatever
life brings.

May you find joy where it sparkles, meaning where it challenges, and
wisdom where it stretches you into your fullest self.

May you be held by Love, sustained by Interdependence,

guided by Truth, and strengthened by the deep, courageous gratitude that honors the whole of your story.

Go in peace, go in hope, go in Love—and find a way to be grateful for it all.

Thank you for your time and attention this morning.