THE GRAPEVINE – *Issue 31:15th Oct 2020*

Dear Friends,

I am very thankful that I had a lovely holiday in Scotland on the west coast for a couple of weeks. The weather was mixed but the scenery was amazing, enhanced by the autumnal colours and light. However, on my first day back at work I had telephone conversations with a couple of friends facing very difficult circumstances in their lives; I watched the news about the rise of Covid 19 around the country with talk of a second wave and further rumours of another lockdown. It all made it so much harder to feel thankful.

Over recent months, truth be told, my feelings often switch between sadness and existential dread. I feel sad that many of our traditions are on hold this year. I sometimes feel irritated with random strangers who I perceive have messed up – those nameless, faceless people who are to blame because THEY didn't take the restrictions seriously enough. And I feel the dread a lot of us feel – that the days are getting shorter and the numbers are rising and "What if we have to celebrate Christmas during some period of lockdown?"

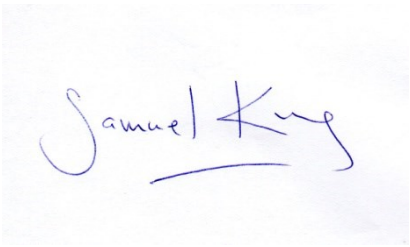
We are called to' be thankful in all circumstances' but it is not coming easy this year. Bitter is easier. Anger is easier. Outrage is easier. Disappointment is easier. Which is why I remind myself: being thankful this year is even more important than usual.

Why? Because true gratitude is more than thankfulness that comes because life is the way we want it. True gratitude is not dependent on life going our way. True gratitude is when we can look around and outside and beyond the blessings we find easy to appreciate and recognise the gifts that we could easily overlook.

This year, perhaps we have the chance to practice true gratitude. We have the chance to be thankful in spite of our circumstances. This can be its own kind of gift, if we let it. My thankful list looks different this year. This year, like no other, I am thankful for things I usually take for granted.

I am thankful that children can attend school. I am thankful for our healthcare system in the UK. I am thankful for supermarkets and those who work for them. I am thankful for government. I am thankful for hand sanitizer and face masks. I am thankful for technology. I am thankful for scientists. I am thankful for people who love me, even though we cannot gather together. I feel thankful as I 'serve' communion, saying "The body of Christ broken for you," as we who are scattered remember together. I am thankful for the future.

I admit that it feels really hard, but I am reminding myself that I can choose to be sad or disappointed or irritated or I can choose to be thankful. And I can choose thankfulness not because things feel "good" – but because there **IS** good. **Because God is good**. Because even hard seasons in life are full of goodness.

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
1 Thess 5:16-18

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