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Gratitude in All Circumstances

By The Rev. Rachel Rickenbaker

As I've gotten older, I've found I have less time to watch TV. However, every summer, I do look forward to watching *America's Got Talent*, a fun show on NBC that showcases talented people from all over the United States. It isn't a typical talent show, though. In addition to a special talent, the individuals who typically get the furthest in the competition have some kind of impactful story to share.

Recently, I was moved by the story of a young woman with a lovely voice. While Jane Marczewski's voice was indeed soothing to listen to, it was her story and spirit that brought her to life. When the judges asked how she was doing, she said that she was well. But soon the viewers and judges find out she is not doing as entirely well as she appears. I won't ruin it for you, but I hope you will check out the link, and watch it through to the end of the video.

I think the reason Jane is on my mind is that I don't often see raw gratitude and humility like hers. She seems to have a vigor for life and a desire to

make the absolute most of her circumstances. Gratitude is something we often think about around the Thanksgiving holiday, but, unfortunately, not as much throughout the rest of the year. Gratitude is not something that always comes naturally to us.

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he tells them to, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

As I reflect even on this past year, I want to say to Paul, "Yes, your advice is much easier said than done. Especially if you haven't experienced what others have." Then I remember that Paul experienced hardship, persecution, and, eventually, martyrdom. The Christians of the early Church experienced much of the same. They followed in the footsteps of the One who suffered the ultimate persecution, hardship, and rejection, the One who went even to death on a cross for the whole world. Christ Jesus endured it all, so that we might have forgiveness of sins and new life in him.

One of my favorite phrases in the Book of Common Prayer is perhaps surprisingly in the funeral liturgy. During the opening of the Great Thanksgiving, the priest says, "For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is changed, not ended." (Book of Common Prayer, p. 382) This is, of course, referring to death, not as an end but a change, a new beginning.

I think this could also refer to our lives now. As the Holy Spirit works in each of us, shaping us more and more into who God intends us to be, we are changed. The response that begins to emerge is one of gratitude. When we face hard circumstances, we can be reminded that life is a gift, that death is not the end, and that our Lord is with us through it all.

Gratitude may not always be on the forefront of our minds. But even now, the Holy Spirit is working in us and preparing us for greater things than we can imagine.

I hope you enjoy this [video](#) and are reminded of the incredible gift of life that God has given us, no matter what comes our way.