

**“Thank You”**  
Rev. Sara Ascher  
*18 November 2007*

A number of years ago someone told me that Americans say “thank you” too much and too easily. I don’t remember the context of the comment, nor who even said it, though I do remember that it was someone not born in the United States. I remember thinking it an odd thing to say, how can you say “thank you” too much? Isn’t it polite and proper to say “thank you”? I know that what is proper and polite differs from culture to culture, but I couldn’t believe that saying “thank you” could be seen as a weakness.

Obviously this has stayed with me and periodically it comes to mind. I am not sure I would agree with the person who made this comment, in fact, I am often surprised and annoyed at how rarely I hear “thank you.” You know, when you’re holding a door for someone and they walk through it without so much as a glance in your direction never-mind a “thank you.” Or when you’re asked for something at work and once delivered the attitude is one more of “why didn’t you have this to me a half hour ago?” instead of “thank you.” Maybe your siblings have asked to borrow something of yours, and when you finally give in and lend it to them they don’t think to say “thank you” for letting them have something you didn’t have to give them.

I’ve become more aware of how often I say “thank you” and a little self-conscious about it. In the course of a meal out I am likely to say “thank you” to the server for every little thing brought to me. Now my mother would be proud maybe, but I have to stop and wonder if there isn’t some truth to “thank you” being too easy to say.

I have to wonder at myself how much I mean it when spoken for the tenth time after my water glass is filled. Has “thank you” become rote? Has “thank you” become a habit we fall into without much thought? And if we can say it so easily, with such little effort, how much can it mean to us? Have these two little words simply become a routine response in the face of one who has performed a service for us and to whom we would not wish to be seen as rude?

How many times a day do you say “thank you?” How many of those times can you say that your heart’s in the saying? I wonder if we’ve not become disconnected to what it means to offer gratitude to others. At this time of year we give much lip service to being thankful and grateful, but I wonder to what depths, if at all, we feel a sense of thanksgiving.

“To make a day, it took an evening and a morning – at least to make the first day. But that was when the world was new and there was in it only light and darkness, day and night and God,” writes Abbie Graham. “The world has grown more complicated since that creative era. To make a day now it takes bells and whistles and clocks and desks and committees and meetings and money and a serial of daily newspaper editions, and hungry people, people who are too tired, and luncheon engagements and telephones and much hurrying. All these things and many, many more it now takes to make a day.”

There is so much in our days distracting us from the meaning that lies beneath our living that it leaves me to wonder if we even know what are thankful for if given a moment to pause and contemplate it. ‘We do most of our living among common days,’

not days such as Thanksgiving when there is an explicit demand to be thankful for something or be seen as ungrateful. Most of our days are filled with the ordinary, often the dull and mundane. But there are a 'myriad of commonplace moments ripe for personal ritual and crying out for consecration.' Everyday moments that if noticed call for a song of thanksgiving, call for a "thank you."

'Ceremony and custom give birth to beauty, restoring a sense of wonder to daily round. Most of us are far too jaded for our own good. We've seen it all. Nothing surprises us anymore.

Which is precisely our problem. We only think we've seen it all. What we haven't begun to see is the abundance that surrounds us, the beauty that gift wraps the extravagance of each day.'

Rev. Christopher Buice argues that, as religious liberals and skeptics, we may not know who to thank or precisely for what we may be thankful..." we are all capable of sharing a deep and enduring reverence for the abundance of this natural world that sustains us. As human beings we find ourselves unable to repress our gratitude for life's many gifts" So in the midst of our hectic and full lives it is in our nature to say "thank you" - to respond to our daily living with the customs and ceremonies of saying "thank you."

So maybe we can't say "thank you" too much, maybe it can't lose its meaning. Maybe the secret of saying "thank you" is that each and every time it matters, it means something, whether or not we are aware of it. For as John F. Kennedy said, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter

words, but to live by them."We don't give thanks out of our happiness, we are happy because we say "thank you."