Over the past four weeks,

Fr. Greg has led us on a wonderful journey

through the landscape of gratitude—reminding us to give thanks

for the breath in our lungs and the world around us, for the cross, for the quiet presence of the Holy Spirit,

and for the rich, grounded heritage of our Anglican tradition.

Listening to him, I found my own heart stirring.

And I began asking myself:

When we strip everything down to the core of our faith, where does our gratitude ultimately rest?

Beloved, our gratitude rests in a person. It rests in Jesus.

If we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus.

If we want to know how much God loves us, we look at Jesus.

And if we want to know why we can gather in this place

week after week with hope in our hearts,

it comes down to three simple, staggering truths: **He lived. He died. And He got up.**

Today, anchored primarily in the Gospel of Matthew,

I want us to take those three truths one by one

and let them shape our thankfulness.

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We begin where the Gospel of Matthew begins:

with a lineage, a promise, and a baby.

But Matthew's Gospel does not merely introduce us to a historical figure,

but to **Emmanuel**—God with us (Matthew 1:23).

We are thankful today because Jesus did not write us a letter from afar.

Jesus did not drop a rulebook from the sky and leave us to figure it out.

He lived.

He became one of us.

He walked the dusty roads of Galilee.

He felt the sting of heat, the ache of exhaustion, the tinge of thirst,

and the rumble of hunger in his stomach

after forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2).

Think about what Matthew's Gospel shows us about how Jesus lived.

Jesus did not lock himself away in a palace or an academic sanctuary.

Jesus was on the ground, among the people.

When the crowds gathered on the hillside, Jesus sat down *and taught them*

that the poor in spirit, the meek, the peacemakers, and those who

mourn are the ones who are truly blessed (Matthew 5:3–10).

Amid the cruelty and inequity of empire, Jesus gave us

a vision of a kingdom where the last are first and the first are last.

But not only that.

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Jesus did not just teach love – He walked it out.

When a leper – someone completely untouchable in ancient society –

came and knelt before Him, seeking to be cleansed and made whole,

Jesus stretched out His hand and *touched* him, saying,

"I will; be clean" (Matthew 8:3).

When tax collectors and sinners sat at table,

Jesus pulled up a chair and ate with them,
declaring, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13).
When the helpless crowds pressed in, Matthew's Gospel tells us
that Jesus looked at them and was moved with deep, gut-wrenching
compassion, because they were harassed and helpless,
like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36).

And so we give thanks today – indeed I am thankful today –
because Jesus lived a real, tangible human life.
I'm thankful that Jesus had to learn how to walk and talk.
I'm thankful that Jesus had parents and brothers and sisters.
I'm thankful that Jesus probably had an awkward teenage phase.
I'm thankful that Jesus had a job.
I'm thankful that Jesus drank and joked and laughed and cried.
I'm thankful that Jesus was angry and frustrated and tired and afraid.
I'm thankful that Jesus broke bread with outcasts and sinners,
healed the sick, touched the untouchable, forgave the unforgivable,
welcomed the stranger, spoke truth to stupid, cast out demons
and raised the dead.
I'm thankful that Jesus prayed.
I'm thankful that Jesus told stories,
beautiful, complicated, problematic, mysterious, compelling stories
that do not fit neatly into our binaries and categories,
that dare us to use our sanctified imaginations,
and that challenge us to see as God sees and love as God loves.

I'm thankful that Jesus knows what it is
to be misunderstood and rejected by family, betrayed by friends,
and weary in body, mind and soul.
And I am thankful that, in Jesus, God knows our names, our griefs,
and our daily struggles.
Thank God, Jesus lived.

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That brings us to the second truth: **He died.**

How easy it is to skip from the beauty of the manger
and the miracles of Galilee straight to the triumph of Easter morning!
But to appreciate the light, we have to stand in the shadow of the cross.
In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus makes it clear
that his life was moving toward a deliberate purpose.
He told his disciples plainly that he came "not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).
Beloved, think of Jesus at the Last Supper,
sitting with and washing the feet of the one who would betray him
and those who would desert him.
Think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane,
saying to Peter, James, and John,
"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26:38),
falling on his face and praying,
"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;
nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

Think of Jesus on the cross beaten and bloodied and crowned with thorns,
hanging between two bandits,
enduring the jeers and taunts of a hostile, aggravated crowd,
still quoting Scripture and refusing to come down.
Think of Jesus and be thankful.

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Be thankful that at the Last Supper and in the Garden of Gethsemane
and on the cross, Jesus shows us what humanity at full stretch looks like.
Be thankful that at the Last Supper Jesus supped with betrayers and deserters
to show us that all are welcome and there is always "plenty good room"
at God's Table – even for people like us.
Be thankful that in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus shows us
that true vulnerability and surrender is not pretending that everything is okay,
but admitting when everything is not okay to ourselves and to others,
gathering some folks who will pray or sit or just be with us,
and prioritizing *spending time with* God
who will love us even when we are broken and afraid and have failed,
who will strengthen us when we are weak,
who will sustain us even when we have reached our limit.
And be thankful that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins
and to show us that even after our worst desire, decision, deed, or day
God loves us anyway, and there's absolutely nothing we can do about it.
Thank God, Jesus died.

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Beloved, if the story ended at the tomb,

we might remember Jesus as a noble teacher, a martyr,

or a tragic figure of history.

And yet the Gospel does not end in the dark,

but in the morning light of our third truth: **He got up.**

He got up – because sin could not stop him.

He got up – because the grave could not hold him.

He got up – because Death could not defeat him.

He got up – because the powers of darkness could not overcome him.

He got up – and everything changed forever.

He got up – the tomb is empty, which means our hope is full.

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And so, Beloved,

as we continue this season of focusing our hearts on thankfulness,

let us carry these simple, unshakeable truths in our hearts and bones.

When life is confusing, when the world feels heavy,

or when we simply don't know what else to pray, look to Jesus and give thanks:

He lived – so we know God is with us in our everyday lives.

He died – so we know our sins are forgiven and we are redeemed.

He got up – so we know that life, victory, and eternity belong to our God and that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age.

He lived. He died. He got up. He got up for us – for you and for me.

And I will bless the Lord, because, as Fr. Greg said,

"Everything we do as Christians, together and separately,

EVERYTHING should begin and end with thanksgiving."

I will bless the Lord who is our portion and our constant friend.

I will bless the Lord who promises never to leave us comfortless.

I will bless the Lord who hears our cries and pities every groan.

I will bless the Lord whose love lifted us.

I will bless the Lord whose life teaches us how to lead with kindness and mercy.

I will bless the Lord whose death challenges us to reject evil and choose good and live at full stretch.

I will bless the Lord whose Resurrection inspires us to love better.

I will bless the Lord who five years, two days, and ten hours

And twenty-three odd minutes ago brought me to Holy Trinity Parish.

"I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth."

Amen.