

When Kate asked me to work with her on a service with the theme of Gratitude, I was so excited. I have been actively practicing daily gratitude for the past couple of years and jumped at the chance to talk about it with you.

I've been aware how incredibly lucky I've been in my life. I'm a white, middle class American. I've been married 25 years to a man who loves me and we have two remarkable, beautiful daughters who haven't caused us much grief at all. I've been able to choose to work or not through most of my adult years. I've known I've been blessed, but somehow I haven't been able to own it until very recently.

In the last couple of years I've embarked on an amazing journey of spiritual and emotional renewal. I've wrestled with my demons of self-hatred and spiritual emptiness and have found my way to a life that I had never imagined was available to me. Instead of reacting to disappointments and unexpected outcomes with intense anger and frustration, I have discovered how to breathe and let go and trust that I will be okay, no matter how bad I feel in a given moment.

Last month I put together a box to send off to Sarah, my younger daughter who is newly away at college. It was one of those days of hard rain. Late in the afternoon the rain let up, so I headed to the post office. I decided to take my little short cut, going in the exit of a parking lot near the post office, a maneuver I've made many times previously. Apparently the owners of the lot installed a device to cause SEVERE TIRE DAMAGE since I had last taken that short cut. Budumbudum. I had four flats like that.

Now, even six months ago I would have been beating myself up for my stupidity, fretting over the cost of the new tires, worrying about getting home to make dinner, generally working myself up into a dramatic lather. But not this time. I slowly rolled through the parking lot and stopped on the street close to the post office, but a little in a red zone. I took a deep breath and evaluated what I needed to do. First, get the package mailed. Once that was done, I proceeded to call for a tow, had a nice conversation with the police officer who could have ticketed me for being in the red zone, and waited calmly for the flat bed tow truck to arrive. I kept on breathing deeply as the time ticked away, trusted that my car would get to the dealer before it closed and hoped I'd get home for dinner before too long. The story goes on into the next day when they still hadn't gotten the new tires on the car before it was time for me to head off to a commitment I had. I believe that my calm demeanor throughout my interactions with him made it easy for the service technician to offer me a complimentary rental car to make it to my appointment. It may be that if I was upset and demanding he might have done the same, but even if that is the case, it felt SO much better operating in a composed way.

The gift of this incident was recognizing that I had changed. I had always been in awe of people who took life's bumps in stride and didn't get upset over the big and little things over which they had no power to change. I could never react with equanimity to the wrenches thrown my way. But something has shifted inside me and a level-headed poise is now available to me without any great effort. For this I am immensely grateful.

How did I get to this place? I've been working on a spiritual practice that involves my getting on my knees in an act of humility twice a day, thanking God for the day in front of me when I first awaken and the day that has just past right before I go to bed. Every morning I spend 30 minutes in quiet meditation

asking for guidance in my day and being thankful for all the blessings in my life. I write daily, dumping all my thoughts and concerns on the page, then turning to listing the many things I am grateful for. Making a commitment to myself and my spiritual practice has grounded me in an understanding that everything happens for a reason and it's my job to figure out the reason, or trust that it will be revealed to me in the future.

Last week, during my quiet time I was thinking about what I wanted to say to you about gratitude and I had a wonderful philosophical insight: it's not just seeing the glass as half full, gratitude is seeing the abundance in what is in the glass.