ON GIVING THANKS IN COMPLICATED WORLD

This statement is a seed, it's written to be read aloud at gatherings, but not as-is. Take this, and make it your own, and share with those whom you love and are grateful for.



A harvest scene from Canyonlands NP

My promise for this day is to be thankful. But gratitude is complicated. There's always the lacuna in thanks, the thing you're thankful not to be. Whatever or whomever is in that lacuna now, thanking them has a tinge of mean-spirited triumph to it. The thief doesn't thank the bank teller, the mugger doesn't thank their victim, not without irony, and not without taking that little bit more: the victim's agency, and the acknowledgement of the reality that the victim didn't want this.

So no, I'm not going to say I'm thankful to the natives who lost their land to my ancestors, or even the ancestors who had their land stolen. I'm not thankful for the slave labor that built my state and connected it to my country. I'm not thankful for the wars fought in my name, the ecologies eliminated, the things destroyed in history to bring me here, to this day.

I'm also not going to say thank you to the people who labor right now for next to nothing to pick my coffee and my chocolate, or the

children who make my clothes, or the people who poison their own bodies and our world to bring me my technology. To all of those people, and to the harmed earth, I am going to say: I am sorry for, and ashamed of, how we've set up this world. And I promise to keep trying to make it better. I promise to not settle for partial and incomplete answers, even while knowing I can never fully get there. I'm willing to make this a life of effort, and I'm willing to give up things, but often I don't know how to do that in a way that makes the lives of others better, and I can't promise I'll ever succeed. So no, I cannot find my gratitude in gifts I received through force. I'm stuck. I must find it elsewhere. And I know that in this whole world I will find nothing to be grateful for that isn't tinged with sadness, and so my gratitude must also be tinged with sadness. But I believe embracing that complexity makes gratitude more real, not less.

So, what *am* I thankful for? I am thankful, first and foremost, to be part of the human race; to be part of a species that perceives its home in the great context of the cosmos, and cares for it, and for each other. I am moved beyond words to be part of a community that seeks to improve this world. I am grateful to be part of a tradition of love for humanity that goes back millennia, and slowly, never fast enough, but never still, makes us better.

I am grateful to the people who have told me a rich history of the world. I am grateful to the willing and determined sacrifices that have made for me the infrastructure to hear their voices. To the people who taught me how to listen: my parents, my friends, my neighbors; to the people who wrote the books I found, I say *thank you so much*. I am so thankful both to the people who told me that we invented great things, and the people who told me we committed great crimes. I am grateful, beyond telling, for the people who have forgiven me and loved me despite the crimes, both great and small, of myself and my ancestors. I am grateful to find in myself the

capacity to forgive those who hurt me and mine, as well. I am grateful to see healing in the world.

This is a gratitude that comes with a mission and a velocity of its own, a gratitude with an appetite. It seeks more to be thankful for, compels us to more love and more work for next year and the year after. It is a gratitude that is sad and joyful, complicated, deep, and striving, all at once.

I am thankful for the ways we make each other whole again. And I am thankful for a future that is better than the past.

I am also thankful to Emptywheel for giving me a place publish my grateful thoughts,
to my patrons for helping me have a voice and a more stable life,
and, most of all, to you.