

## Aug 26– Blessings – Celebrating God’s Presence in Each Moment

Scripture: Luke 12:22-27

Before I took a group to Ireland to enjoy that country and its unique religious heritage, I spent quite a bit of time studying Celtic Spirituality. Irish Christian spirituality combines our Christian faith with the deep abiding sense of being surrounded by the holy, found in all things. This emphasis comes from their earlier Celtic worship roots. Celtic Christians acknowledge God’s presence in every aspect of living—from waking to sleeping, from birth to death, from mundane chores to momentous celebrations. They perceive God’s creation as a holy gift. So “blessing” can be understood as the very stuff of life, not something necessarily favored, good, special or extraordinary; but all of life is seen as a gift.

Over this sermon series I want us to think about what it would mean to live as if each day and every moment in the day was to be seen and celebrated as a blessing. Blessing—it’s one of those Christian words that we say and perhaps, we know what it means or do we? What exactly do we mean when we say that we are blessed? Usually it is associated with good, positive and unexpected things occurring in our lives or those around us. What about those who are poor or experiencing challenging times? Are they without blessing? Do we interchange blessing with “lucky”, only with a holy flair? Why would we want to consider something a blessing from God instead of just chalking it up to good fortune or a sweet turn of events?

Historically, the terms blessed/blessing really did have religious meaning: sanctified by a religious rite—as in, the blessing of a home. Or something was blessed made holy—as in a marriage being blessed. The etymology of the word is interesting—from Middle English we have *blessen*. And, before that, *bletsian*, Before that, *blodsung*, referring to a blessing with a blood mark or sacrifice. Over time the meaning came to be associated with God’s favor when things were going well, as in a nation blessed with peace. This restrictive use of the word blessing was always against the Celtic view that God was in all of life, blessing all of our days. This was particularly true for the Irish who were persecuted for their faith for over 400 years, experienced famine and death, and

could be arrested and deported for speaking their native tongue. They needed to remind themselves that even in such times God was blessing them.

Our scripture today seems to indicate that this was much more Jesus' view on life. When he said, "Consider the lilies of the field" he was challenging his listeners to trust in the goodness of God. Trusting God is celebrating how God is with you and in all you do. It is finding blessings not in what you want but in what is.

And so the Irish created blessing prayers. Blessing prayers ask us to pause and lift up whatever we are experiencing in that moment to God and to see how God is in that moment. These blessings reveal a sense of the holy in every moment, in every thing, in every person. This is a way of living—of observing and celebrating, blessing and being blessed by the ordinary acts and encounters of life. It is a way of living that we, in our hurried, multi-tasking, end focused world, often reject or neglect.

I want to pose a question, "What if we saw every moment of every day as filled with blessing?" Today, we are going to focus on what it means to see each moment of the day as a time for celebrating God with us; to celebrate the ordinary things of life that bring blessings to our day. If we do not invite ourselves to slow down and observe, we will not see the Holy, sacred healing grace of God present all around us.

Each week, during this series, we are going to be reading some blessing poems to help us focus on the theme for the day. Do you remember the two that were shared? The first was "Bless our Waking." In it, we were asked to think about all who wake, weep, fear, laugh, hunger and hope. In that range of emotions we were to see God is at work. By implication we are challenging ourselves to be that blessing to others, knowing God is blessing us when we feel this way. So I want to ask you a question: How do you start your day? Do you lay there thinking of all the things you need to get accomplished? Do you dwell on unresolved issues in relationships? Or, like in this poem, do you take a few minutes to remind yourself that you are to act in ways that bless all those around you?

The other poem was titled, "A Blessing of A Summer Day." In it we were reminded to bless this day. We were to bless the flowers and other beauties of the

season. But then, we were challenged to bless those who stand with those in need implying that this is what we are called to do as well. We ask God to bless the world, our bodies our hearts and hands that we may be blessings to all we meet. Blessing prayers celebrate how God is active around and in you but always they challenge you to be a blessing to others.

So what does it mean to live each day as a blessing. In preparing for this series I came across this excerpt from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, the founding book for that worthwhile organization:

*When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life?*

*On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives.*

*In thinking about our day we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come.*

One of the ways we notice the blessings of our lives is to simply delight in the “small things.” Everyday objects from our morning coffee to our pets and everyday activities like washing dishes or taking off our shoes can become occasions of blessings. Moving through our day with the mantra “I am Blessed by \_\_\_\_\_” is a Celtic practice that slows us down and challenges us to focus on the gifts of life.

Today I want to have us think about daily practices that can help us instill this sense of blessing in our lives. The first of these is to stop on occasion, once or several times a day, and name three things that you have touched or touched you in the past few minutes and see them as a blessing. If it was at breakfast the list might be the coffee you are having, the food you are eating and perhaps the person you are with or the pet at your feet. If you did it right now, what three things would come to mind? Perhaps you would name the church, or think of one or two special friends who you have visited with today, perhaps a visitor you met might come to mind as a reminder to

be a blessing, maybe the music, or perhaps it is the sense of love you feel because you are in a particularly vulnerable time and this feels like such a safe place. Do you sense how pausing for a moment to name those things and claim them as blessings changes the entire dynamics of life? Breakfast become a holy meal. Church becomes a sacred place.

To help with this naming of the blessing I, on occasion, set times each day to name the blessings. Sometimes I pick random times like 10 am and 4 pm. When those times come and I stop for a moment to name a blessing I am experiencing right at that moment. I am surprised at how easy or how challenging it can be. Those times might come right after or in the midst of a challenging phone call. How do you find a blessing there? It might be at a time when I have been doing the paper work required of a pastor. Is there a blessing? Of course, if you look for it. Challenge yourself to pause at unexpected moments to name the blessings of that time.

I try to see in every interaction a blessing. I sometimes need to remind myself of this fact. When the conversation is contentious, to focus on how there is a blessing here or how I can be a blessing is hard, but it helps me to emotionally defuse the situation. When I am dealing with clerks at stores, staff at restaurants, and the like, to remember that each interaction is a blessing makes me see the person as an individual not as someone to serve me. When I remember, I often engage them in brief conversations or at least thank them for their service. Usually this elicits a smile and we have both been blessed by the exchange.

Finally, like the AA big book, we need to evaluate each day and ask have we moved through it filled with blessing prayers? When the answer is “yes,” end the day with another blessing of success. When the answer is “no” give it to God knowing the blessing of forgiveness. And end your day with a plan for tomorrow, to start focusing on the life you have and how you can bless others in all situations.

In closing let me share an example of how this works. As many of you know, I spent much of July alone as Jenny was in Texas with our newest granddaughter. I was having one of those out of kilter days. There were no big issues, it just seemed everything was out of balance. Our cat decided 4:30 am was a great time to start his

day and would not let me go back to sleep. Work seemed to have lots of interruptions and the harder I worked the farther behind I got. My sinuses were bugging me thanks to all the pollen in the air. I was in a grumpy mood and definitely not singing praises to God about the day. I was not being a blessing to others. As I sat at my desk late in the afternoon I began to have a huge pity party. I was grumbling about how I was going to have to fix my own dinner, there was a load of laundry to do, and so on. Ever have one of those days? This was just when I had been working on this sermon. It all of a sudden hit me, I was not living what I preached! So, I took a deep breath and said, "Lord help me to name the blessings I am experiencing this moment." For a moment my mind was blank. I was in that much of a funk. Then I started thinking about things. I had a home, I had food to fix for dinner, because of technology I was in touch with Jenny and receiving pictures, people had stopped by the office to enquire about how I was doing and how Jenny was handling the heat. With the naming of each blessing my mood changed. Soon, I was feeling really good about things. I decided I still liked the cat!

We are called to name our blessings. God surrounds us daily in all ways. In naming them we find we are lifted up and blessed and, even more, we see how we can be a blessing to others. We are going to, during this series, talk about blessings we feel at special moments, throughout the year, and ultimately how to find blessings even in the challenging and tear-filled moments. God is faithful. God blesses us. We are called to acknowledge and share those blessings with others.