

RECOGNIZING THE BLESSINGS IN LIFE

November 15, 2015 Towson Presbyterian Church, Towson, Maryland

Spoken words on the tragedies in Paris, Beirut, Baghdad before a modified sermon for this Sunday. Outline for this part:

- There is evil in this world
- We have united once again in the face of tragedy and death
 - Soccer stadium where people sang the French national anthem in the face of adversity
- Seeking justice
- The reign of love overcomes; Christ among us and God is with us
- Seeking comfort: (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
 - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God"
- Hope: Psalm 23:4
 - ⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me."
- Even among on all the death, tragedy and injury, there is always hope.
 - We must look for the blessings in life
 - Nell Berry story that follows

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Someone said, **Everything that comes from God is a blessing, we are filled with constant graces from God in everything that happens in our lives because all things are under the watch of the Divine Will. To seek God's blessing is to seek His care for us and that He will preserve us from falling into evil.**

Nell Berry wrote about her life growing up in Missouri. She wanted to share events of her life with others in a very warm, down to earth fashion. She lives near mark twain lake in mid-Missouri with her husband.

Nell wrote this about her sense of being blessed. "In truth, I have had a very blessed life. Oh I know, some people will say, "But you had to grow up as an orphan, how is that a blessed life?" Well, I was blessed to have had my parents for nine years. I was blessed that they loved me and didn't give me away or abandon me on the street or worse. I was blessed to have a brother who was willing at the age of 24 to take me and give me a home. I was blessed that I didn't get into drugs and alcohol as so many young people do as teenagers. I was blessed to have had somewhat of a Christian basis of a belief system when I was

a child. Blessed by God, my Father who didn't throw me away either; who loved me unconditionally and saved my soul.

Nell continues, "Truly I have been blessed. I have felt the presence of Almighty God in my darkest hours. In the times of prayer when I have been praying for my family; in times of distress when I could not see anything except despair, I felt the presence of my Heavenly Father there keeping me sane. His presence is not always a physical presence; just a knowing that He is there with me and He hears my every prayer. It gives me a sense of security; a feeling of well-being; of knowing everything will turn out alright.

"I only wish I could relay this secure feeling and a knowing frame of mind to others so they could find what I have found. I can't give to them or relay it to them. They have to have a transformed life; transformed by the Holy Spirit of God to have that frame of mind." Thank you Dear Lord for your presence in my life." [Nell Berry louis_berry@bellsouth.net]

The life Nell lived speaks to the awareness of a gracious and loving God in her life. Even in the difficult times of her life, she felt the love of God and acknowledged the blessings.

Friends, you and I come to acknowledge the blessings of God in our lives. The mere fact that we are God's creation is a testimony to a blessed life. It is important for us to continually seek and appreciate the blessedness in ourselves and in others.

When I traveled between St. Louis and Kansas City on I-70, a billboard caught my eye. It was a picture of four young boys huddled around the younger brother. The smiles told the whole story of their care for one another. Now, it was the youngest brother that brought the saying on the billboard to life as he was a Down syndrome child. The National Association for Down Syndrome sponsored the sign and it said, "We have been blessed."

Each one of us is blessed in many ways. Sometimes we just have to reflect on our lives to see how much we have been blessed. For many we can acknowledge:

- ❖ How blessed one appreciates the gift of family
- ❖ How blessed one feels in having good health
- ❖ How blessed one feels in the presence of Christ
- ❖ How blessed one enjoys the changing seasons that God provides
- ❖ How blessed a person is when singing an inspirational hymn
- ❖ How blessed one feels that God's love is unconditional.

Friends, we feel blessed by what we receive and what we give. The blessedness we feel comes from a heart full of gratitude and compassion. We acknowledge our blessings so we can bless others.

My Dad always prayed for me when I was a boy by placing his hand on my head. The particular prayer or blessing comes from a passage in the Old Testament that is found in Numbers 6:24-27. God gave this blessing to Moses to pass on to Aaron and his sons. **²⁴The Lord bless you and keep you: ²⁵the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: ²⁶the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.** God also said to Moses, ²⁷"**So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.**"

This prayer is the same one I pray for my daughters, my son-in-law and my family. Even when my granddaughter, Jorah, was giving me a good night kiss and hug, I placed my hand on her head and prayed this prayer. She got quiet and snuggled in close when I began to pray. What a blessing she is to me.

The Gospel lesson from Mark is another example on how Jesus took care of the people. He recognized their physical hunger of the people and said to his disciples, **2“I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. 3If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance.”** The disciples wondered how they could feed so many in the desert. Jesus wanted to know how many loaves of bread they had to feed the people.

With seven loaves, Jesus took them **and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd.** There were also a few small fish, Jesus took them, and **blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed.**

Jesus blessed the bread and the fish. Through his words and actions, the Lord set them apart as a holy meal. The people ate and were filled for the journey ahead. Their lives were blessed with a Savior who saw to their spiritual and physical needs.

Let me share with about a man named Bob Guthrie who was a very faithful follower of Christ in his word as well as a servant dedicated to his church. He sold insurance in a neighboring town and worked his family farm in the country. He and I spent many an hour talking and praying about the gifts God has given to us. Whenever we talked about the church and how one supports the church, he said something that made a lot of sense. He said, “A lot of people don’t like to talk about money in the church. That’s fine for them but I think they approach giving in a less than faithful way. They look at giving to the church after all the bills are paid and they go out to eat or whatever. I follow a biblical truth that has given me what I need and not worrying about where the rest will come from.”

Bob said “Deuteronomy 26:2 (NRSV) has always guided my approach to money and how I give to the Lord’s house.” **2You shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.**

So Bob wrote the first check of the month to the church he loved and felt he was truly blest. That congregation was blessed after he died as well because he left the church in his will. The church was the first to receive from his will.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, yes, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Our lives are a blessing to God and to others as we dedicate our lives to Christ.

In closing, sometime back, in one of Bill Keane’s *Family Circus* comic strips the little boy says, “Ah-choo!” And his mother said, “God bless you!” He says it again and again she says, “God bless you!” He does it again and again, getting louder each time, and again and again his mother says, “God bless you!” After the fifth “Ah-choo!” His mother says, “You’re pushing it.” The little boy replies, “I was just tryin’ to be really blest.”

Friends, many of us have been blessed so much we don't need any more blessings. We need only to be grateful for the blessings we already have, and we need to be ready to share some of our blessings with others. Jesus said, **'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'** Acts 20:35

May it be so for us.

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Supporting Scriptures:

Mark 8:1-10 (NRSV)

¹In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, ²**"I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. ³If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance."** ⁴His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" ⁵He asked them, **"How many loaves do you have?"** They said, "Seven." ⁶Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. ⁷They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. ⁸They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ⁹Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. ¹⁰And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

Deuteronomy 26:1-2 (NRSV)

¹When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.