

May You Be Blessed and a Blessing
Psalm 24; Ephesians 1:3-14

Sermon preached by Carol Osweiler, Director of Christian Education
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This message is just straight forward....Praise God with everything you have, with your whole being, and live the blessing that you have received...by blessing others. This passage boldly states that we have a guarantee of a future inheritance; our salvation is a reality. God planned all of this with us in mind; God's love is shown in us and our part in creation.

I should say Amen right here but as I dug into this Ephesians passage I found other notes of interest. This word "bless". Here is a bit of trivia, the word "bless" in all its forms is used 654 times in the Bible. The accountants out there sitting in our congregation—please do not make an audit on that number. In other words it is used a lot. The very first line of our passage today is "How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is!" Wow. Of course God is blessed, that is really a no brainier. When I looked up the term "bless" in my trusty Theological Dictionary it said: to praise, petition for divine favor, wish someone well, convey favor. Biblically it describes God's actions, as in the frequent blessings that Jesus conferred on people. In simple terms it is an expression of God's graciousness and love. God is a blessing and that blessing is passed on to us.

We are blessed with this tiny bit of insight into the nature of God through Jesus Christ. We can feel the graciousness of God's love for us. It is in recognizing and feeling this lavish blessing that we take on the acknowledgement of God in our lives and in our creation.

Seeing God in creation is a blissful experience. The group that left yesterday on the Garden Tour might have seen God's handiwork in the beautiful gardens they toured, or it might have been a walk in the woods, or God might have touched you as you sat on a park bench and reflected on the blessings you have felt throughout your week.

I believe Pastor Bill in one of his sermons suggested that we do this: record your blessings. I had done it in the past but as always some good habits fade away and I thought it would be good for me to start doing it again. So each night I reflect on my day and note all the blessings that come my way. Many of them were very unexpected and filled me with this gracious nature of God's love.

Let me share with you two experiences of God's blessing on me and how I knew I was a blessing to the people I met. As you know we are in the midst of Vacation Bible School, registrations are coming in like mad. I had about 5 things going on my desk when I answered my phone. I was upset for the interruption....heavens I have a sermon to write and someone dares interrupt

me. The lady on the phone was a mother of three. She and her husband had just lost their job and wanted their kids to come to our Vacation Bible School. She didn't want a full scholarship because she knew that everyone was hurting with the economy. The blessing that God has given Oak Grove with the many generous givers has given a blessing to this family. All three children are coming to our Vacation Bible School. I met this mother and she was so thankful; her son was along with her and he was ready to come right now. I felt blessed by her presence and by the eagerness of her son to join our church family. Oak Grove blessed this family in more ways than we will ever know.

I want to end this morning with my reflections on my first trip to Honduras. I was in seminary and part of our theology class we were invited to take a trip to Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala. This was in January of 1999; right after Hurricane Mitch hit Honduras. We were surprised that we could even enter the country because of the horrible and devastating damage the hurricane left the country in. We were allowed to enter Honduras and all we saw was one set of camps after another; people who had lost their homes, their fields to the mud slides. These camps were made up of plastic tents with hundreds of people gathered together without proper water supply and food. Our group felt helpless, weak, and just questioning why we even came. We could not help these people, we had no resources to help them and they looked at us with grief-stricken eyes. Our hearts were breaking.

Late one afternoon the group's guide took us to a village where the families refused to leave and go to the camps. The village was isolated because the bridges leading to their village had collapsed due to the weight of the mud. Our guide told us it would take years to replace the infrastructure of this community. Our bus stopped right at the edge of a cliff; we walked and climbed over broken concrete, trees, and metal that had been the roofs of many of the villagers. The village seemed happy we came and it didn't matter to them that we came without as much as a bottle of water. We were asked to follow the leaders of this community to where the mud has come down the hillside and suffocated the people and their land. I walked with a woman who I never learned her name, it really never mattered. We walked and she talked; I could get a few words about the horror she experienced. As we walked the mud had dried and was now cracking from the heat of the sun; it was difficult walking but this woman wanted me to see something...she wanted me to see where her house was and where she lost her husband and her son. To this day I can still see the barbwire fence that probably was way of keeping in the goats on her land. The fence now had only a pair of men's pants stuck to it. She started to cry as we walked closer to this area she bent over in tears. I could not help but hold her; our tears blended as we held each other. Two strangers, two women who cannot communicate but have united in the blessing of each other. I was holding Christ in my arms. I was blessed and I trust I was a blessing to this woman. I walked with her in her grief, I felt her pain, and comforted her in God's love. We never shared our thoughts of God and if she was mad at God for letting this happen. We didn't have to; our

communication was done through the reaching out and supporting one of God's children in need.

May you be blessed and a blessing. God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and our right response to these blessings is to live for the praise of Christ's glory. As the church, we are to live lives of service, working for peace and reconciliation among our brothers and sisters all over the world through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Our youth group's trip to Berekley-Hillside Presbyterian Church saw a church in need of new life. They experienced what a struggling church has to deal with. I pray they were a blessing to that faith community. They came with excitement and joy in bringing the little ones to their Vacation Bible School. We are not sure nor will we ever know the seeds they have planted at Berekley-Hillside but we know that our group was blessed for their time there. They shared the lavish gifts God had given them; they reached out and moved beyond their comfort levels to bring the joy of God's word to the Berekley- Hillside community. Our inheritance into God's family brings us many wonderful blessings but it is our duty as a member to respond to these blessings. Find a way this week and the weeks to follow to identify your blessings, make a response, and be a blessing to those you meet.

May you be blessed and a blessing.

Amen