

Sermon on Blessing  
To go with sharing about visiting our Sister Church

July 15, 2018  
HPMF

**Psalm 67**

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make God's face to shine upon us,  
that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.  
Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.  
May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere our God.

**Matthew 5:2b-10** (*Poverty & Justice Bible*)

Jesus' disciples gathered around him, and he taught them:

God blesses those people who depend only on God. They belong to the kingdom.

God blesses those people who grieve. They will find comfort!

God blesses those people who are humble. The earth will belong to them!

God blesses those people who want to obey God's word more than to eat or drink. They will be given what they want!

God blesses those people who are merciful. They will be treated with mercy!

God blesses those people whose hearts are pure. They will see God!

God blesses those people who make peace. They will be called God's children!

God blesses those people who are treated badly for doing right. They belong to the kingdom of heaven.

Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast says that if we listening closely, we can “hear how similar they sound, the words bless and blood. Blessing, rightly understood, is the invisible bloodstream pulsating through the universe – alive and life-giving.” ‘

“Just to live is holy,” says the Jewish sage Abraham Joshua Heschel. “Just to be is a blessing.”

Conveying God’s blessing is a rich practice that is deeply embedded in the Biblical and Christian tradition. And yet, as Anne has already helped us think about, we are not generally a people who go around liberally offering/giving blessings upon one another. During my first year, I sat with Rob & Annette in their home and we called Angel & Janet in Colombia – I speak no Spanish, so Annette was translating. Having never met or spoken before, I was a bit at a loss of what to say, and Annette encouraged me to just offer blessings. For which I tried, fumbling around awkwardly, hoping Annette would make me sound better in the translation. In our culture, for most of us, this is not part of our regular lexicon – even if we went to seminary. Even after a sneeze, we might feel a bit uneasy if someone uses the whole phrase, “God bless you”, rather than simply “bless you.”

Besides a sneeze, on our country, it is likely that the times we most often hear the word ‘blessing’ comes at the end of a political speech, “And God Bless America.” This first became a practice in 1980 when Ronald Regan accepted the Republican Nomination for President. Since his presidency, these past 38 years, this line has helped form and shape us as a nation.

This phrase and its usage clue us into part of what blessings do – they are an expression of our hopes and our longings for the one whom we are blessing. Like all prayers, they form and

shape us over time. We hope that in the metaphysics of how God has created the world, that our words of blessing go out into the world and have an impact – that they enter into the bloodstream of life and pulsate through, working with other pieces to bring life. We cannot know. We have faith that this happens. What we do know is that we are shaped by giving a blessing. As is the one who hears our blessing – shaped by this simple gift of love expressed through word.

Just think of the different place we might be in as a country if our political officials had been, these past 38 years, ended their speeches with, “And God bless all the peoples of the world.” I am not sure, but my guess is we would not be so focused only on ‘America first’ legislation and ideology, but perhaps a bit more focused on the flourishing of the world.

Author John O’Donohue writes, “The word blessing evokes a sense of warmth and protection; it suggests that no life is alone or unreachable. Each life is clothed in the garments of spirit that secretly links it to everything else. Though suffering and chaos befall us, they can never quench that inner light of providence.”

I find that to be a helpful understanding of a blessing – in no way saying that it keeps us from the suffering and chaos that life can bring – but a blessing stands as an affirmation that, whatever suffering may come, the inner light of God in each of us cannot be snuffed out – whatever chaos may emerge, the love of God that exists in and through and around us cannot be extinguished.

A blessing, like a prayer, is no guarantee that life will go well for us or that harm will stay away from us. Last Sunday I said, that perhaps “In all things God has a will, but not everything that

happens is the will of God.” In offering a blessing, it is an expression of hope that things might be more aligned with the will of God; that for that person or that occasion or just for that moment, things may line-up with how God hopes they will be. Offering a blessing is a reminder of the light of God which pulsates in and through all things – that light of God – the bloodstream of all creation.

And so, in one small step toward being a people of blessing, let’s practice together. I invite you to stand and reach out a hand southward, toward Colombia, and repeat after me.

**Practice together:**

The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make his face to shine upon you

And be gracious to you

The Lord lift up her countenance upon you

And give you peace.

*Dios le bendiga. Amen.*