

Sermon: Feb 2, 2020- You are Blessed!

Let us pray, in your grace and love O God, we have gathered here together today for worship. WE offer you our thanks for your blessings in our lives, and in turn offer to you all that we are and all that we will become. Please accept our prayers, the words of my mouth and all the mediations of our hearts. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

You are blessed!

Take a moment to let those words sink in and really hold on to them. No matter how you feel today, no matter what joys or worries you are carrying, no matter anything else, know that you are blessed! And don't let anyone tell you different.

Without any doubt in my mind, one of the hardest questions that is posed to me on a fairly regular basis by folks within the church and outside the church, is where is God in this? Said in another way that question can sound like this, "I have spent years praying, years living a life of faith, years doing what I am suppose to do, and then this happens, why did God let this happen? Where is God in this?" Its hard question to answer; but maybe not because of what you think. Really finding words or experiences of God in our lives is not overly hard; maybe its just me but I tend to see God at work in all sorts of expressions and ways

everyday. I see God at work in the smile of stranger, in kind words offered to a loved one, in the sun rising over the horizon, in a community gathered together for worship and fellowship; God is in all of that and more. So, for me at least, its not finding the right words of expression of God that is hard, what is hard is speaking those words or expression into whatever the “this” of the question is?

You see reality of the human experience is as such, that we often don’t question God’s presence in our lives when things are going smoothly. I have never been asked the question of (Where is God in this?) when a grandmother tell me the story of holding her brand new healthy and lovable grandson for the first time. When harvest is bountiful and the bins are full of a bumper crop, very few people ask, “where is God in this?” Instead that question is reserved for times in life when the smooth road becomes filled with potholes; times when conflicts and tragedies occur.

Where is God we ask, when our loved ones have to face yet another treatment? Where is God in the midst of a tragic death? Where is God when you have lost your job and must depend on the foodbank for your survival? Where is God when you see how addiction has gripped your loved one? Why does God allow those things and experiences? Where is God in this? Speaking to the “this”

whatever the this is, is what makes that question hard. Because gripped in that moment, it is hard to see anything other than the pain we are facing, its hard to be believed that we are blessed.

Two thousand plus years ago and more, there was a belief system put into place, that still lingers today. We hear it in the language we use when we refer to the times when we are blessed and, in the times, we ask where is God in this? That belief system was built upon the idea that if you were prosperous, if you were healthy, if you had influence, power and wealth, had standing in your community, if things, no matter what those things were, were trending upward or just staying at an consistent even keel, it then meant that God had blessed you; that God's graces were upon you; thus that God's love for you was reflected in how good your life was.

However, the other side of the coin with that belief system then is that if you were not well, not wealthy or prosperous, if grief and/or tragedy has struck, if illness had come to you and your family, that it meant that God was doing the opposite of blessing you; namely punishing you and yours for whatever sin you or they held. For much of our biblical history and much of our own history and even current day understanding this belief system was and is deeply rooted. Those

that had where seen as blessed and those that did have not were seen as being punished by God for their sins.

That belief, and the lingering effects of it in our current day, is the reason I began by saying to all of you that you are blessed, because as St. Paul's writes "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom." The reality of God presence in our lives, is that God is present in all of it; whether we accept it or not. We, as humans in our infinite wisdom, have created a number of belief systems that we have presumed are joyfully accepted by God; but in reality, are quite clearly not. And I am not trying to shame you if you have asked "where is God in this?" because we have all asked that question. But the reality of our faith and the reality of the one whom we follow counters this belief.

Our reading today from Matthew begins with Jesus climbing a mountain and speaking to crowd of people that have gathered. It opens what is known as the Sermon on the mount which is one of the longest discourses we have from Jesus. We have no idea who was in that crowd, but it is fair to imagine that much of the crowd gathered that day to listen to Jesus were people that we not part of the community normally seen as being blessed by God. And how does Jesus open this sermon, this one large instance when he speaks about God rather the just

living the Kingdom? He opens it by countering all the beliefs that these folks had created and shows them how God responds to us all. “Blessed are you,” he says, and this is paraphrase so please bear with me, but “Blessed are you, who are weak and poor in spirit and in life, you grieving, you shy and meek, you hungry, you kind and caring, you who make peace with cooperation and sharing, you who engage others and look to do good no matter the cost, you are all blessed. And when people put you down, say mean things or lie about you, don’t be afraid, because you’re blessed.”

That without question would have been the first time most of those gathered that day had ever heard that God would consider them worthy of blessing, for their entire lives they had been painted with brush of being punished for their sins. Jesus begins the most important Sermon that we have to hold and read, not by listing commandments rules or regulations, but by saying that you, all of you are blessed, loved and cherished by God. That you, all of you, are worthy of God’s grace. Those aren’t just powerful words, their revolutionary words, words that breakdown every single wall created between people to uphold the so-called wisdom of the age. They are so important, that they are the very first thing Jesus says to the crowd. He indeed was a teacher because he knew that after ten or

more minutes of talking people would check out and so if the first moments when he had everyone's undivided attention, he says, "You are blessed."

Fast forward a couple thousand years and we today are listening to the same words that Jesus spoke only maybe they need to be altered just a little bit for us to hear them clearly. So again please bear with this paraphrase, but Jesus says to us today, "Blessed are those who struggle with feeling good enough when they don't look like the latest "it" person, can't afford the latest fashions or just don't seem to "fit in." Blessed are those who do their best and feel like it's still not enough. Blessed are those who feel like a failure because they lost their job and are struggling to find one. Blessed are those who work two or three jobs and have trouble making ends meet. Blessed are those who feel ignored and unheard, like no one is ever paying attention to them. Blessed are those who struggle with mental health. Blessed are those who feel abandoned and lost in a complicated world. Blessed are those whose family and friends do not see as anything other than what they have labelled them as. Blessed are those who are tired of walking in grief. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who beside hospital beds. Blessed are the vulnerable, the gentle, the kind - all those whom society labels weak, you are stronger than you know. You are blessed.

Those are just as radical words today as they would have been in our yesterdays, because those times do not feel like blessing filled times. Those times of sorrow and worry do not feel like blessing filled times, it feels like God is not there in it, like God doesn't care. But Jesus, the one whom we follow, reminds us today, as he did a crowd thousands of years ago, that no matter the situation we face, no matter whether life is running smooth, or instead feels like a Saskatchewan road, that we are blessed. God's blessing does come from stuff, or powers, or health, or wealth, or status, or culture, or religious belief. We are blessed because we are of God, made of love, seen as worthy in God's eyes, not because of what we have or did, but because of who we are in this moment and in all our moments. God is always there, because we are God's. God always sees us as worthy of love and care and thus is always present in our lives and so hear me again my friends, you are blessed! Amen.