
Blessing Is The Most Important Thing We Do

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – Year A**

Jesus went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (Matthew 5:1-12)

Blessed are you! Blessings to the poor! Blessings to those who mourn! Blessings to the meek! Blessings to those who hunger and thirst! Blessings to the merciful! Blessings to the pure in heart! Blessings to the peacemakers! Blessings to the persecuted! Blessings to those who are reviled!

Blessed! Blessings to you! “Blessing” is the most powerful word in the Bible.

In the Book of Genesis (Chapter 1:22), the very first thing God does after creating humankind, is to bless them. God *blesses* Adam and Eve, and says “be fruitful and multiply.” God blessed them, and thus began the long story of blessing all the rest of us.

At Genesis 12:2, when God called Abraham to be a father of faith, God said, “I will bless you, ...*so that you will be a blessing.*” With that proclamation, God set in motion a whole family of blessing, a family which would one day contain all sorts of sons and daughters of Abraham. Every child of Abraham – Jewish and Christian and Muslim – every child of Abraham is meant to be a blessing in this world! Every child of Abraham – Hindu and Buddhist and Confucian, too—for every child of faith is a child of Abraham – is meant to be a blessing in this world. To follow God, to follow Abraham, is to bless.

In the Book of Numbers (6:22-27), when the Hebrews were in the wilderness, the Lord instructed Moses to give Aaron this blessing: “Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, 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 his countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

In the Psalms, blessings occur in both good times and bad times, in both joyful and sad times. And at Psalm 103, the psalmist sums it all up with the great words, “*Bless* the Lord, O my soul. Let all that is within me, *bless* his holy name.” Blessings to humanity, but blessings to God, too. When we bless God, we bring the journey of blessing full circle, back to the originator of blessing.

Our gospel for today, this passage from Matthew, joins other scriptures as one of the grand “blessing parties” of the Bible. We call this set of verses “the Beatitudes,” “the Blessings.” Jesus gathers his disciples together, up on a mountain, and he conducts a “Blessing Meeting.” He looks out over the crowd, and he sees..... What *does* he see?

What does Jesus see when he looks out over humanity? Well, he sees what any of us would see if we take an

honest look. He sees people who are poor, people who are mourning, people who are meek and persecuted. He sees people trying to make peace, trying to be merciful. And he sees people who are scorned are reviled. He sees us, all of us. Jesus doesn't see only the high and mighty, the rich and the powerful. He sees the lowly; Jesus sees you and me.

And Jesus blesses that crowd, that crowd which represents all of humanity. Jesus enjoys blessing all people, but especially the poor and the persecuted, those who mourn, and those who have mercy, and those who make peace. The Beatitudes are Jesus's Blessing Meeting. Beatitudes of Blessing!

"Blessings to you!" This particular Christian Church, the Cathedral of St. Philip, is saying that, too. We are a blessing church, trying to bless like God blesses. We want to bless like Jesus blesses.

Of course, some of us have gotten into trouble trying to bless like God blesses. We have blessed civil rights, reproductive rights, gay and lesbian rights; and we will continue to do so. And we will continue, in this Christian Church, to bless the poor and the persecuted, especially those forced to flee their own countries, persecuted for righteousness' sake.

In the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, the prophet sees a vision of the kingdom of heaven. He says, "I looked out and I saw a great multitude that no one could count, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev 7:9). That is to say: they are not just Christians in this vision. They are all the people of God, all blessed by God, all welcomed by God. They have come out of persecution, and yet they are singing! They are singing, "*Blessing* be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Yes, heaven itself is a place of blessing, and for blessing. But it takes practice. That is why we practice blessing here on earth. That is why we practice heaven on earth.

When I bless the Peachtree Road Race – year after year on the Fourth of July, Independence Day – when as many as sixty-thousand people run (or walk!) past our church within three hours, I am blessing all sorts and conditions, all of humanity in that wondrous event. To every tribe, and people, and language: Blessings to you!

Blessings to Muslims: *Asalamu Aleikum* !
Blessings to Jews. *Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu*
Blessings to Christians: Christ bless you! *Benedicite Deus*
To Hindus, to Buddhists, to atheists, to agnostics.
God blesses each and every one of us. *Dios les bendiga*.
Beatitudes of Blessing!

It may be that the most important thing we do in life is bless people. Blessing is the most important thing we can do.

Certainly the most important thing we do with *children* is bless them. The most important thing a parent ever does is bless a child. And we are meant to do it over and over again. For we are the children of Abraham, the children of blessing. Each of us reproduces what our elders show us. We copy our elders. From our faithful elders, we learn how to reproduce blessing. Now, it is our joy to pass that blessing on to the next generation.

When we bless children, we are helping them grow into men and women. Blessing enables growth. If you want the person beside you to grow spiritually, bless them. When we bless others, they learn how to bless, too.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek! Blessed are those who hunger and thirst, the merciful, the pure in heart! Blessed are the peacemakers! Blessed are those who are persecuted! Blessed are you, all of you, the children of Abraham and children of God.

AMEN.

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