

## Worship Service: BLESSING

**Welcome:** Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is \_\_\_\_ and I'll be leading our worship time today. Our theme for today is **blessing**. What do you think blessing means?

It turns out that blessing is all over the scriptures; in fact it seems like one of God's most frequent actions is to bless his people, and one of God's people's most frequent actions is to bless or thank God. So today in our worship service, we'll hear more about blessing in the Bible and some stories about being blessed.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

**Opening Prayer:** Great and loving God, we invite you today to be in our minds and in our hearts and to be among us in our time of worship. We ask that your Holy Spirit bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and especially forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes understanding. Amen.

### Opening Hymn: Doxology, p. 1

**Statement of Faith:** Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23 together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

**Hymns:**

**For the Beauty of the Earth, p. 2**

**Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us, p. 3**

**Amazing Grace, p. 4**

**First reading:** Matthew 5:1-10, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount:

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them. He said:

<sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

**Hymns:**

**Holy, Holy, Holy, p. 5**

**Jesus Loves Me, p. 6**

**Second reading:** A Big Bag of Shoes, by Keith Rawlinson<sup>1</sup>

God said He would bless us for following His ways and He keeps His promises.

Unfortunately, this concept has led to some misunderstanding. Too many people think that God is going to bless them with material wealth, usually in the form of

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<sup>1</sup> edited from <http://www.eclecticsite.com/bigbagofshoes.html>

money. It is important to remember that God promised to bless us when we do things His way, but he never said *how* he would bless us.

There was a woman in church who had found herself a single mother. She had little or no income and was finding it very difficult to provide for her children. As a result of the low income, she could no longer afford the house she had been renting, so had to move out of the house and into an apartment. Since the move was just across town, she saved time by packing what belongings she had into boxes and garbage bags.

The next day, after the move was completed and she had unpacked all of the boxes and bags, she realized that the garbage bag into which she had packed her and her children's shoes was missing. She drove back to the house she had been living in and asked the landlord if he had seen the bag of shoes. With sincere apology, the landlord told her that he did see the bag of shoes, but since it was left behind and in a garbage bag, he assumed it was trash and had already disposed of it. The woman was devastated. Her church shoes and the shoes she wore to her job were in there, her children's school shoes and church shoes were in there as well. Now, they were gone and she could not afford the money to replace them.

Someone at church heard about the situation, decided to be an answer to prayer and spent their own money to replace all of the shoes the woman and her children had lost.

This is a true story and, trust me, the woman was very relieved and felt very blessed to have her prayer answered so quickly, completely and specifically. God could have just provided her with some side work through which she could have earned the extra money to replace her family's shoes. God could also have chosen to have someone just give the woman cash so she could replace the shoes. There are many ways that God could have put money into the woman's life so that she could replace the shoes; but, God chose instead to bless her with a big bag of shoes. No more than she needed, and no less.

### **Hymns:**

**Softy and Tenderly, p. 7**

## Leaning on the Everlasting Arms, p. 8

### Interactive Homily:

Let's think a little more about blessing. The dictionary defines blessing as a kind of approval or encouragement, either from God, ourselves, or others.

- What kinds of blessings do you give?
  - for food; family, especially children and grandchildren
- What kinds of blessings have you received or asked for?
  - for a marriage, for a course of action, for a move far away. And of course we ask for the Lord's blessing on certain actions: bless this trip, bless this job.
- How do you feel when you are "blessed"?
  - More than simple or fleeting happiness; goes deeper, a contentment, a sense of well-being and safety – experiencing life in all its fullness
- What do you consider ongoing blessings in your life? How have you seen God or other people bless you?
- Do blessings sometimes come in unexpected forms, like the bag of shoes? I wonder if you've ever experienced a blessing that was a complete surprise?
- How can we "count our blessings" every day?
  - pray, pay attention, look for the good in people and situations, write down things we're grateful for, tell others what we're grateful for in them
  - As we are blessed by God, we become a blessing to others.

Let's take a moment to silently pray and reflect on our blessings and how to bless others.

**(Silent Prayer)** ... Now let us say the Lord's prayer together:

**Lord's Prayer:** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

**Hymns:**

**This is My Father's World, p. 9**

**It is Well with My Soul, p. 10**

**Standing on the Promises, p. 11**

**Third Reading:** Ephesians 1: 3-10

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

**Hymns:**

**Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, p. 12**

**Shall We Gather at the River, p. 13**

**Fourth Reading:** Quotes on Blessing

“When we lose one blessing, another is often most unexpectedly given in its place.” –C.S. Lewis

“For Equilibrium, a Blessing:

Like the joy of the sea coming home to shore,

May the relief of laughter rinse through your soul.

As the wind loves to call things to dance,

May your gravity be lightened by grace.

Like the dignity of moonlight restoring the earth,

May your thoughts incline with reverence and respect.

As water takes whatever shape it is in,

So free may you be about who you become.

As silence smiles on the other side of what's said,

May your sense of irony bring perspective.

As time remains free of all that it frames,

May your mind stay clear of all its names.  
May your prayer of listening deepen enough  
to hear in the depths the laughter of God.”

— John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*

“The unthankful heart discovers no mercies; but the thankful heart will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings.” –Henry Ward Beecher

“We all are so deeply interconnected; we have no option but to love all. Be kind and do good for any one and that will be reflected. The ripples of the kind heart are the highest blessings of the Universe.” –Amit Ray

**Hymns:**

**Blest Be the Tie that Binds, p. 14**

**I Need Thee Every Hour, p. 15**

**Closing Blessing:** (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Closing Hymn: Doxology, p. 23**