



Worship Service Theme: 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. Our theme for today is **blessing**. What do you think blessing means? *[pause for feedback]*

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 and some stories about being blessed.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, 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 as we confess our sins, for 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

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

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

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

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

⁴Yea, 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.

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

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

Suggested Hymns:

For the Beauty of the Earth

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Amazing Grace

First reading: Matthew 5:1-9, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount:

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Jesus' disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them. Jesus said:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

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

Suggested Hymns:

Holy, Holy, Holy

Jesus Loves Me

Second reading: A story about blessing, called “A Big Bag of Shoes,” by Keith Rawlinson¹

God said He would bless us for following His ways, and God keeps His promises. Unfortunately, many people misunderstand this promise and think that God is going to bless them with material wealth, usually in the form of money. God promised to bless us when we do things His way, but God never said *how* he would bless us.

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

The next day, after the move was complete and she had unpacked everything, she realized that the garbage bag into which she had packed her and her children’s shoes was missing. She drove back to the rental house 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 in a garbage bag, he assumed it was trash and had thrown it away. The woman was devastated. Her church shoes and her work shoes, and her children’s church and shoes, were all in that bag. Now they were gone and she couldn’t afford 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 it’s an interesting look at how God blesses us. God could have just provided this single mom with some side work for extra money to replace the shoes; or someone could have just given her money to replace the shoes. But instead, God chose to bless her with a big bag of shoes. No more than she needed, and no less.

Suggested Hymns:

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

Softy and Tenderly Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

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 we give?
 - for food
 - for 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
 - We also ask for the Lord's blessing on certain situations: 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
- Do blessings sometimes come in unexpected forms, like a big bag of shoes? I wonder if you've ever experienced a blessing that was a complete surprise?
 - In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, blessings come from surprising sources:
 - Poor in spirit → blessed by having the kingdom of heaven
 - Meekness → inherit the earth
 - Hungering and thirsting for righteousness → will be filled
 - What kinds of blessings are these? Material things?
 - Not material blessings, but spiritual blessings
- What do you consider ongoing blessings in your life? How have you seen God or other people bless you?
- 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

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

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray 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.

Suggested Hymns:

This is My Father's World

It is Well with My Soul

Standing on the Promises

Third Reading: Genesis 12: 1-3

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- From the earliest times of God's interactions with people, God promises that as we are blessed, we become a blessing to others.

Suggested Hymns:

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Shall We Gather at the River

Fourth Reading: Quotes on Blessing

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

A blessing by author John O'Donohue, in *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*:

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. ...
May your prayer of listening deepen enough
to hear in the depths the laughter of God.

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

“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.” –Indian author Amit Ray

Suggested Hymns:

Blest Be the Tie that Binds

I Need Thee Every Hour

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. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)

[Extra material] Ephesians 1: 3-10

³ 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, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his

grace,⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.