

Sunday February 13, 2022 Epiphany 6 Blessed are They ...

I Corinthians 15:12-20 Luke 6:17-26

“Count your many blessings, name them one by one,..” are the opening lyrics of an older hymn of our Christian faith. If we are to do what this song asks, just what are blessings and what might we include in this list? A blessing is an act or words of a person who blesses. It is also considered a special favor, mercy, or benefit: the blessings of liberty. Or it is a favor or gift bestowed by God, thereby bringing happiness: the invoking of God's favor upon a person:

. What are the blessings in your life? For some people it is waking up and being able to fully breathe and move about. For others it is knowing that God is with them as they witness the wonder of his creation. For still others, it is realizing that this life we now have is only a glimpse of living eternally with God.

A couple of weeks ago I was working in the afternoon at my home office. I noticed my cat standing as tall as she could and staring out the front window. What are you looking at? And then I saw what she saw.. There were six wild turkeys in the front yard near the trees. They were looking for food. These turkeys are huge and as I saw them they continued as a group to move away from the house and down the street. They are large birds! They were walking on the lawns, through yards and up driveways. And when I could not see them any further I went back to work. A little while later the cat was again at the front window and staring out. These turkeys had walked around the block and were headed back towards the church parking lot and the Turkey Creek drain which is on the far side of the parking lot. It was interesting to see these big birds walking around as I had not seen them be so bold as to walk along the yards and street.

But it wasn't until later when I saw something else. As it was growing darker that evening, these turkeys were back but not walking around. They were now perched up in the large trees around our house and neighbour's house too. And they sat there. Early the next morning before the sun was up, while I was bringing my paper in, I could hear something gently speaking. The turkeys were still in the branches and moving a little bit. It was quiet and just a beautiful sky as the sun was slowly rising. What did I hear? Turkeys talking gently, quietly and calmly. They were content and this truly felt like a gift to me in the morning. Talking turkeys sitting quietly in the trees as the sun rose. It was a blessing a gift of God to remind me to stop and living for there are many unclaimed blessings which surround our lives.

There are two main categories of blessings physical and spiritual. Physical blessings pertain to our physical being. Examples include food, drink shelter all which help us to maintain

a safe and secure life. Spiritual blessings are gifts from God for us because we are spiritual beings created by Him. God gives us these blessings so that we know more about Him and that we may grow from within.

Our reading from Luke 6 describes Jesus sharing this message from a plain closer to the people as they wanted to touch him and be healed. The parallel story in Matthew 6 has Jesus speaking from a hillside. Yet the words that Jesus spoke are similarly recorded by both Matthew and Luke for the purpose of the message. One might ask whether it really matters from where Jesus spoke when he taught what has become known as “the Beatitudes”. However one must also note that in Luke Jesus speaks about both blessings and woes. But what are these blessings and warnings and how do they rank with each other!

Blessings are from one individual to another or come from God to each of us. They take on many meanings under differing circumstances. The song that is played to praise God is a blessing for us all; it is a blessing that we receive as we share in Baptism and feel the water on our faces; it is a blessing when we receive a gift unexpectedly from another person. It is also easy to ask “God bless you” when someone sneezes, but what do these statements mean for us as we strive to live blessed, happy lives in answer to Christ’s call to serve?

Jesus then gives four ‘woe warnings’. With these statements he is challenging his listeners to know that if you fail to be a blessing or offer blessings to others there are consequences. To the rich he warns that they have already received consolation. He is speaking to those who were corrupt on the inside but acted righteously on the outside. They believed that their good deeds would make them right with God. Their self-righteousness excluded their need for repentance. And they were full of self-righteousness.

To those who eat well now there will come a time that they will be hungry. They are satisfied with their lives and with the praise of others. They are content to rest in the fact that they will make it to heaven on their good deeds alone. Yet, they will be hungry for more. They will always be searching for something else to fill that void.

. For those who are laughing and carrying on now Jesus warns them that there will be a time of mourning and weeping. This will take place when they meet and stand face to face with God, and they will come to the horrible realization that life was meant to glorify God not oneself. There is nothing wrong with enjoying life but you must include God.

And his last warning is in regard to a person's reputation or characterization. People may speak highly of them but with regard to their false beliefs being like false prophets. This also refers to people who think themselves as higher than others. But God calls us to be humble.

Blessings and woes- Jesus shares these ideas with the people because they were searching for the messiah to change the circumstances in life. He spoke about the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, and persecuted as being blessed. This was difficult information to receive because they were hoping that Jesus would lift them up and show them how to live life more fully.

But what is necessary from our point of view listening to these statements from the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to put what we do as Christ's faithful followers into practise. How do we connect with the poor- not just people with little money, but the poor in spirit? Do we share the message of Christ openly and freely? How do we connect with the hungry? What are people hungry for? Yes there are many who are in need in our city and across the country but in these times there is a true hunger for someone to say, I care or I am listening as you search for something to fill your Spirit and your hope. Even when we look at those who are mourning or crying over different kinds of losses. There is a huge responsibility for all who have faith to respond and listen. And those who are being persecuted—I think about the Ukrainian people—do they want conflict or war? What about what is happening in other parts of the world? There are people being persecuted for who they are and what they believe. How might we respond as faithful followers of Jesus? Or are we amongst the ones receiving the warning?

As we consider what is happening in our world how might Jesus' blessings statements help us to move in our faith? What is it that Jesus is teaching us and calling to do in light of what we hear in the news both internationally and locally? Not only must we remember that blessings are physical in nature, but where do the spiritual blessings come from if we are unsure of what is needed? How do we pray and what are we asking for?

The beatitudes inspire Jesus' followers to live according to the traits he describes. Some of these acts are simple, and some are grand, but they all form the cornerstone of the ideal Christian lifestyle. They are the foundations for a life of authentic Christian discipleship and the attainment of ultimate happiness.. And what does this mean? What is the ideal Christian lifestyle? Be a blessing and to bless others in Jesus' name. To be Christian means to also follow Jesus' teaching to love and to build a relationship with God. IT also means to have faith and believe that He lived, died and rose again for their sakes and that through confession of sin we

are forgiven and receive the gift of eternal life. It means that you have answered Jesus' call to serve and that it is your purpose to love others and share this message of hope so that others will know him and be blessed as well.

The world needs hope and blessings and a way forward into the time that will be called post-pandemic. God has been with all people throughout human history. Maybe, just maybe God is calling us to be blessed by him in a new way so that we might in turn bless others.

Have you experienced God's blessings? Even the simple song of a bird or the face of one who has come to know Jesus as Saviour? Or maybe it is you who are seeking God's hands upon you as you strive to reach out and know Jesus as your Saviour. Whatever the situation, know that you are a beloved child of God and are blessed. Delight in God's gifts to you and respond with thanksgiving. Rejoice and be glad for you are part of God's kingdom. Thanks be to God.

#### PRAYER

Holy God, you bless us with your Spirit's presence. Guide and protect us always as we seek you and live to be blessings to others. Enable us to we pray to do your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.