

SUNDAY, February 16, 2025 EPIPHANY6 Blessings abound

Psalms 1 Jeremiah 7:5-10 Luke 6:17-26

**SNEEZE!** When one sneezes many people say "God bless you". It is often seen as a polite way to wish someone good health. It may have originated in Europe during the bubonic plague because some people believed that sneezing separated the soul from the body and with this blessing they were united. And sneezing was a common symptom of the plague. Others believed that when one sneezed evil spirits were expelled and so asking for God's blessing prevented the spirits from re-entering. And still others believed that when one sneezed, the heart stopped beating so that asking for God's blessing encouraged the heart to continue beating!

Blessings- we've used this word in so many that we are not really sure what we mean when we say, "Let's ask God for a blessing." Just what are we asking or seeking when we look to be blessed?

One day, a poor boy who was selling goods from door to door to pay his way through school, found he had only one thin dime left, and he was hungry. He decided he would ask for a meal at the next house. However, he lost his nerve when a lovely young woman opened the door. Instead of a meal he asked for a drink of water. She thought he looked hungry so brought him a large glass of milk. He drank it slowly, and then asked, "How much do I owe you?" "You don't owe me anything," she replied. "Mother has taught us never to accept pay for a kindness." He said, "Then I thank you from my heart."

As the boy left the house that day, he not only felt stronger physically, but his faith in God and people was strong also. He had been ready to give up and quit.

Years later that young woman became critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. They finally sent her to the big city, where they called in specialists to study her rare disease. Dr Howard Kelly was called in for the consultation. When he heard the name of the town she came from, a strange light filled his eyes.

Immediately he rose and went down the hall of the hospital to her room. Dressed in his doctor's gown he went in to see her. He recognized her at once. He went back to the consultation room determined to do his best to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to the case.

After a long struggle, the battle was won. Dr Kelly requested the business office to pass the final bill to him for approval. He looked at it, then wrote something on the edge and the bill was sent to her room. She feared to open it, for she was sure it would take the rest of her life to

pay for it all. Something caught her attention on the side of the bill, and she read the following words: "Paid in full with one glass of milk" Signed, Dr Howard Kelly

The question to ask is who had been blessed and when/ how? The young girl, the boy or later on the man or the woman?

Just what do we mean by blessings? Usually they are categorized in four ways:

- 1) Everyday blessings; health good relationships, companionship, stable finances, creation
- 2) simple blessings: a cup of coffee, a sunrise, a hug, a phone call
- 3) Blessings of Hope: May you not be alone. May you draw on the stories of those who have come before you.
- 4) Blessings from God: grace, kindness, wisdom, spirit, comfort, peace and love

But blessings- may include- Spiritual blessings, material and financial blessings, undeserved and unsolicited blessings as well. But what is a blessing?

In our reading from Luke 6 we learn that Jesus has been teaching and has moved from where he stood above the crowd to now being at the level of the people along with his new disciples. There were many people gathered together to hear his teachings. The crowd came closer to him in order to be healed of diseases or unclean spirits and they believed him to be the son of God and that if they touched him, they would be healed.

Jesus then takes a moment and looks up to the disciples and starts talking about Blessings and woes. Blessings which seem impossible to understand-- how can one who is poor be blessed? Or if one is hungry? Crying, hated, excluded reviled and defamed? How does one understand what it means to be blessed? Jesus then states because one day your reward will be great in heaven and in that day you will rejoice and leap for joy. Why? Because you will be in the presence of God and know that your struggles will be over.

This all sounds all right but did the people hearing it then just like we who listen today really think they were blessed? Just what was Jesus meaning in these blessings? What Jesus was teaching them was that at this point in their lives they were living through opposition to what the rest of their world was knowing and yes they were struggling. But what he then states is that this struggle is temporary.

Just reflect upon your life right now. How are you blessed in this moment? How is your relationship with God? What about the people around you as we worship together are they offering and blessing you? Maybe even think about what our Psalm 1 reading included; Blessed people are like trees planted by streams of water, because they will yield fruit in season, the leaves will not wither and in all that they do, will be strong and prosperous.

And what is the alternative to being blessed? Being filled with woe! And Jesus describes this--woe-to the rich, you have received your consolation; you who are full now will be hungry later; and woe to you who laugh now you will mourn and weep later. And woe to all who speak well of you now for this is what ancestors did about the false prophets. Jesus is warning those who are rich, full and laughing because they are experience an easier life now because they are seeking to be lifted above others rather than identifying themselves as followers of Jesus. What this means according to Jesus, is that they will suffer later on and into eternity. This is because they are unsure of how to be humble, faithful and giving of oneself.

Some of you might know about the Canadian singer Drake who exercises his heartache and despair in his music, I'm not a fan but one thing I have learned about this singer is that he has woes just like everyone else and he reflects on them in his music. But he acknowledges them for what they are- temporary struggles which he knows will help him grow stronger. He also talks about these woes as 'his crew' and that it stands for 'working on excellence'. If we just pause on that for a moment, aren't all our struggles temporary which may lead us to new insights and understanding? If we take those struggles and work on them and seek something better, won't these woes become blessings?

As Jesus shares these ideas with all who are listening, we may also understand that even for today we need to look beyond the circumstances that happen day to day and find meaning in every day. What does it mean to be blessed? What are you working on to change and from where are you helping others? Out of blessings others as you have been blessed or citing wonder and searching for clarity? You have answered Christ's call now it is time to be a blessing and bless others; it is time to take those woes and turn them into something worth working for in Christ's name. Blessings abound but are you seeing them? Experiencing them or are you filled with woe and wondering what to do. Jesus said that there will come a day to rejoice and be glad. Today we continue to rejoice knowing that one day we will fully understand God's blessings in our lives and as we grow in faith we will leap with joy.

#### PRAYER

God of love we praise you and thank for the blessings and woes in our every day life. Help us to grow in faith, trusting in you to guide our way not just in this moment but always. Amen.