

**SUNDAY – May 10, 2020**

**EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY**

W.L.	Val
Music	Darrell, Shelley, Aaron, Grace, Ray
Psalm	Tyreese
Story	Shelley
Sermon	Claire
P.A.	Aaron
Video	Darrell

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**Theme: 'The Spiritual Discipline of Blessing'**

**Call to worship** Friends, let us worship God today, for God is great –  
**God has blessed us with life, with faith, and with community.**  
Let us worship God today, for God is good –  
**God forgives us, and encourages us, and loves us.**  
Let us worship God today –  
**Because we are God's people.**  
Let us worship God.

by Beth Merrill Need on *Hold Fast to What Is Good*  
<https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com>

**Gathering prayer**

**Gathering song** "I sing the mighty power of God" HWB#46

## **Psalm 103 vs. 1-5,19-22**

### **Offertory prayer**

### **Story for all ages**

**We sing** "Blest are they" StJ#94

**Scripture** Matthew 5.1-12

**Sermon** *The Spiritual Discipline of Pronouncing Blessings'*

Claire

**Hymn of response** "New earth, heavens new" HWB#299

### **Peace Lamp**

### **Pastoral prayer**

Our God, our Creator, our constant companion, so intimately present yet unimaginably powerful, we come to you.

We come to you with thanksgiving . . . for more warm days and sunny skies, for green shoots and tender flowers. For robins, meadowlarks, song sparrows, even crows announcing their presence. We thank you for the hope and delight that your creation brings.

We give thanks for the minds of those who created the technology that helps us communicate with each other and we are thankful for the hearts and minds of those who know what encouraging things to say and do using those devices.

We give thanks today for our mothers and grandmothers. Thank you for their love, shown by their nurture, instruction, discipline and plain old hard work. May they feel our appreciation and honour even though we cannot be together.

Even in these strange times, we have many reasons to give thanks and we pause

to individually offer thanks for these now.

We continue to pray for those making decisions about how to deal with the health threat that the Covid virus has brought, for the health care professionals that care for those that are sick and for the communities where there have been recent outbreaks. We pray for patience and understanding as we all try to make sense of these unfamiliar circumstances.

As distancing restrictions begin to relax, we ask for patience as our lives continually change. We remember those who remain isolated because of their age or where they live. No one knows when they will be able to move about freely. We ask that they feel your presence and that we have the creativity to remain connected in some way and help their needs to be met.

In the MRMC church family we especially today remember

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and ask your blessing on them and their families.

Each of us, wherever we are, also carry someone in our heart for whom we would ask your love and care. We pause to name those people now.

In the uncertainty of these days, we sometimes feel anxious, angry and impatient with the circumstances. . . or people in government . . .or with those near to us. We ask forgiveness when we have done, said or thought unhelpful things. Help us to continue to make the effort to grow and maintain healthy relationships.

Our God, our Creator, our constant companion, so intimately present yet unimaginably powerful, we come to you.

Through Jesus we pray. Amen

**Sending song** "Go now in peace" HWB#429

**Sending words** God has blessed us with life, with faith, and with community.  
**Let us bless others with compassion, kindness and presence.**  
God forgives us, encourages us, and loves us.  
**Let us bless others with forgiveness, encouragement and love.**

Go now to love and serve the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God!**

## **Postlude**

### **I Sing the Mighty Power of God**

I sing the mighty power of God that made the mountains rise,  
That spread the flowing seas abroad and built the lofty skies.  
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day.  
The moon shines full at God's command and all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord, that filled the earth with food.  
God formed the creatures with a word, and then pronounced them good.  
Lord, how they wonders are displayed, where're I turn my eye,  
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky!

There's not a plant or flow'r below, but makes thy glories known,  
And clouds arise, and tempests blow, by order from thy throne.  
While all that borrows life from thee is ever in thy care,  
there's not a place where we can flee but God is present there.

Text: Isaac Watts, *Divine Songs for Children*, 1715, alt.

Music: *Gesangbuch der Herzogl*, 1784, harmonized by William H Monk, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, Appendix 1868

### **New earth, heavens new**

1. New earth, heavens new, Spirit of God moving;  
new seed, creatures new, Spirit of life moving;  
new man, woman new, image of God moving.

### *Refrain*

Sing a new song to the One who has said,  
“Behold, I make all things new.”

2. New love, mercies new, Spirit of God moving;  
new strength, hopelessness new, Spirit of life moving;  
new hearts, spirits new, image of God moving.
3. New minds, wisdom new, Spirit of God moving;  
new law, covenant new, Spirit of life moving;  
new name, nature new, image of God moving.
4. New earth, heavens new, Spirit of God moving;

new birth, creatures new, Spirit of life moving;  
new men, women new, image of God moving.

Text: Harris J. Loewen, 1982, *Assembly Songs*, 1983      Music: Harris J. Loewen, 1982, *Assembly Songs*, 1983  
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### **Go Now in Peace**

Go now in peace, go now in peace,  
may the love of God surround you  
ev'rywhere, ev'rywhere you may go

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Music: Natalie Sleeth, *Sunday Songbook*  
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# BLEST ARE THEY

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David Haas

VERSES 1-3



1. Blest are they, the poor in spir - it, theirs is the  
 2. Blest are they, the low - ly ones, they shall in -  
 3. Blest are they \_\_\_\_\_ who show mer - cy, mer - cy



1. king - dom of God. \_\_\_\_\_ Blest are they, \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. her - it the earth. \_\_\_\_\_ Blest are they who  
 3. shall be theirs, \_\_\_\_\_ Blest are they, the



1. full \_\_\_\_\_ of sor - row, they shall be con - soled. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. hun - ger and thirst, they shall have their fill. \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. pure \_\_\_\_\_ of heart, they \_\_\_\_\_ shall see God! \_\_\_\_\_

REFRAIN *Sing twice after Vs. 5*



Re - joice \_\_\_\_\_ and be glad! \_\_\_\_\_ Bless - ed are you, ho - ly are you! Re -



joice \_\_\_\_\_ and be glad! \_\_\_\_\_ Yours is the king - dom of God! \_\_\_\_\_

VERSES 4&5



4. Blest are they \_\_\_\_\_ who seek peace; they are the  
 5. Blest are you who suf - fer hate, all be -



4. chil - dren of God. \_\_\_\_\_ Blest \_\_\_\_\_ are they who  
 5. cause of me. \_\_\_\_\_ Re - joice and be glad, \_\_\_\_\_



4. suf - fer in faith, the glo - ry of God is theirs. \_\_\_\_\_  
 5. yours is the king - dom; shine for all to see. \_\_\_\_\_

Sermon Matthew 5:3-11, Genesis 18:10-15; Psalm 103:1-5; 19-22

May 10, 2020

### Spiritual Discipline of Blessing

#### INTRODUCTION

Here at MRMC we are working through a series entitled Everyday Jesus Spirituality. We remind ourselves that “Spirituality is about attending to the movements of the Holy Spirit. (We pay attention) in order to draw closer to Christ and Christlikeness. Often we associate spirituality with such ancient practices as prayer, fasting, worship, solitude and silence. But Christian spirituality is not just about these ‘sacred’ activities; it can include ‘whatever you do’ (Colossians 3:23). [Barbara Brown Taylor]

Anything can be a spiritual practice if it shifts our thinking and our acting away from ourselves and onto Jesus and his mission. Doing the laundry, planting seeds into the earth, walking, cleaning out the garbage. Today we will consider the Spiritual Practice of Blessing and consider how it helps us to draw closer to Jesus.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese spiritual leader has observed. “There are two ways to wash the dishes. The first is to wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes and the second is to wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes” Only the second way – washing the dishes in order to wash the dishes – constitutes a spiritual practice.

After hearing this, my husband Garth has elevated the mundane daily chore of washing dishes to a spiritual practice. This, at least, is the case when he washes the china dishes that we inherited from my mother. And also the nickel bronze cutlery that our kids and we tucked into socks and shorts and placed in our suitcases as we made our way home from Thailand.

#### PRAYER

We wait now in silence to hear your voice, God of blessing. Help us hear, grant us wisdom, empower us to follow. AMEN

#### Genesis 18:15-20

We begin in the Hebrew Scriptures. Here we find recorded an extended narrative on the life of Abraham and Sarah – and their relationship with God. Yahweh God spoke to Abram saying, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:2-3) Now this is all fine and good, except for one thing – Abram was 75 years old and his wife Sarai was 65 years old when God gave him this blessing. And they still had no children.

But they did have a few adventures and some mis-adventures along the way. When Abram was 99 years old, God again promised him a blessing. God made a covenant with Abram and changed his name to Abraham. “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you..” (Genesis 17:6)

Even Sarai got into the blessing scene. Her name was changed to Sarah. And God said to Abraham, “I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her and she shall give rise to nations.” (Genesis 17:16) She received the same blessing as her husband.

And then one day, the following year, Abraham and Sarah received three visitors to their home. After the choicest flour was made into cakes, and a tender and good calf was selected for the meal, the three guests ate in the cool shade of the oak trees. But Sarah remained in the tent. When she heard the blessing offered by the guests "Sarah will have a son" - she laughed. At her advanced age, this seemed highly unlikely.

Sarah doubted and denied, she laughed and she lied, because of the "absurd disproportion between the divine promise and the human possibility."<sup>4</sup> Her response was entirely human, and not really surprising. From a human perspective her disbelief was warranted, even appropriate. People do not procreate in old age. Her unbelief evoked a rhetorical question in the punch line of the narrative: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (18:14).

Humanity often finds itself in awe and disbelief in the presence of God: you might say, we are in a place of laughter. Not the laughter of joy and happiness, but the awkward, uncomprehending laughter at the inconceivable – perplexing. "Why did Sarah laugh?" Because it is what we humans do when faced with the possibility of more than what our limited minds can grasp. We often know no other way to be; we are incredulous in our laughter, unwilling or unable to accept the idea that God might actually accomplish what God has promised.

In a way, maybe what God was saying to Sarah was, "I know it's hard to believe what I have promised. Everything about this seems topsy-turvy to the ways of the world. You did laugh, but that's okay. You're not the first, nor the last one to laugh at what seems impossible. But that doesn't mean it can't happen."

God blesses Abraham and Sarah with a promise – a promise of children and land – the promise of a future. God is offering Abraham and Sarah a blessing so they in turn can bless others. "I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations".

### **Matthew 5:3-11**

In our second scripture from the gospel of Matthew, Jesus words about blessing sound a lot like God's words to Abe and Sarah. He, too, invites us into a way of living that promises a future. The blessings in the Sermon on the Mount are spoken to disciples, followers of Jesus Christ. The 'you' of which he speaks is the plural you – the community of believers who have been 'baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Matthew 3:11). God's future is to be enabled through Jesus and his followers. They are salt and light. (Matthew 5:14, 15) They reflect faithfully the true nature of God. They bless each other.

These blessings characterize the kingdom of God. Christ's community will reflect these characteristics in their daily life. Because, you see, they/we live by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit which is poured out on all who follow Jesus.

John Driver (Kingdom Citizens) reminds us "the beatitudes are, in reality, a moving declaration of God's grace." (57) Blessed are all those who by the grace of God, participate in the new life- the upside-down kingdom which already anticipates the future kingdom in all of its fullness – a kingdom which reflects God's real intention for all of humanity. When we share our blessings with the world, it becomes creation restored.

Let's look at a few of the blessings listed here.

1. In verse 7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy." The way Mathew uses the word merciful in his gospel, it means "to pardon the offenses of others as well as to do good to all who are in need." When blessed communities practice both forgiveness of sins, as well as generosity, the resulting society is one in which the forgiveness of God becomes a reality. It is communicated through brothers and sisters within the human family – no physical distancing required.
2. "Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted." verse 4. When the community of Christians practices empathy – walking non-judgmentally with others in pain. When the believers seek for ways to overcome the causes of many sorrows = many will find comfort.
3. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God." verse 9. When Christians decide not to kill each other anymore, when inequities and conflicts are addressed with fairness and compassion – when cooperation and generosity are stronger values than success and wealth and long life – peace may well break out!

## CONNECTIONS

Just as the first witnesses of the Sermon on the Mount were invited to live into God's future in a counter cultural manner, so are we. Our world has taken a significant pause as schools and businesses, churches and sports teams has stopped 'doing business as usual'. The pandemic roaming our world has invited us to halt from our break neck schedules and our impressive routines, and has created space for us to spend time with our own thoughts. World history has fashioned for us an opportunity to conceive again and to re-shape the future – to create again the place we call home.

In a recent podcast of Sunday Edition (CBC radio), Professor **Henry Mintzberg**, Researcher of Business Administration & Economics at McGill University, maintained that COVID-19 has changed the nature of our relationships with each other. The systems that we as a society have developed include government which protects us, business which supplies us and community which engages us. These sectors are like a three legged stool. When they are in balance – government, business and community, our society functions best. But this current pandemic has highlighted weaknesses in how our given societies function. Mintzberg claims what we need now is for the **community** to step up and provide leadership as we seek to re-balance into our "new normal".

Jesus was all over that. Just look at what he tells us in the beatitudes. There is a blessing to come, and followers of Jesus are to lead the way by blessing each other and the world – especially those caught in the margins. Leadership that is based on Christ-like values will shape a future filled with God's blessing. Christians, who read and practice the beatitudes, are all over that!

## BLESSINGS STORIES

I want to tell you two stories that will hopefully engage your holy imaginations to consider the future you want for yourselves, your children and their offspring, and the world. These stories are true and give voice, hands and feet to the spiritual practice of blessing others.

- A. On a recent MCC learning tour to Viet Nam, we learned about how the

Official American war ended in April 1975. But the war is still not over for some 3 million Vietnamese plus their families and communities. The herbicide or defoliant used by the American troops known as Agent Orange, continues to impact the lives of many communities especially in central Viet Nam where the US bases were located. Other areas heavily sprayed were along the border with Cambodia and Laos where the Ho Chi Minh trail served as corridor for Communist and North Vietnamese troop movement. Trees and crops were destroyed in some 25% of the land area. With the forests destroyed, troop movement became easier to track. With the destruction of crops, enemy soldiers could not settle in with the peasant farmers.

Three million Vietnamese are living with life altering disabilities. One of the ways that MCC is seeking to respond to the AO crisis, is to provide therapists to train local folks in the art and science of Occupational Therapy.

Esther Bucher is one of those therapists who gave up her life back home to make life better for those on the margins – those who cannot make life easier for themselves. She and her husband Paul, now already in their 70s, came to train local therapists in a rehabilitation center in Quang Ngai Province. The newly trained occupational therapists said the first thing she taught them was “love and patience”. Then she taught them how to manipulate limbs and develop mental pathways. As, with obvious affection, they told us about Esther, the words “Christ like – Christ like” kept running through my mind. Esther blessed not only the therapists but generations of clients yet to come. She blessed many with a future.

B. In our local daily newspaper, the headline “Bakery provides low-cost bread as ‘way to give back’” caught my eye. Nestor’s Bakery co-owner (Keith Jorgenson) remembered his grandparents telling stories of communities coming together to help the war effort. People repurposed their businesses and efforts in a common cause.

His bakery here in Saskatoon, lost 97% of his business when schools, restaurants and other businesses closed down in mid-March. He decided to change his operations. He now sells his bread at cost to organizations that can afford it, gives it away free for those who can’t. He sells baked goods for one dollar to self-identified low-income people. No staff have been laid off at Nestor’s Bakery. Orders for fresh baking can be made online. One can also order additional loaves for the charity of your choice.

Jorgenson admits “I’m just happy the bakery has been able to stay open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Keeping its connection with the community and helping as many people as possible is just the icing on the cake – it’s better to keep the lights on and keep the staff employed.”

## **Denouement**

**In the Middle Ages when someone sneezed you said “God bless you” fearing that they may have the plague. The mantra we repeat so regularly developed, that is, as a way to ward off fear of evil, disease, and death. Let’s use these words to bless each other – not out of fear so much as out of delight in the other, not death but God’s new life.**