

Sermon: Luke 24:13-35 © The Rev. Kate Heichler; Preached at Christ Church La Plata/Wayside
“Expect Blessing” 5 Epiphany, Year C, Sunday, February 10, 2019

Word of God: speak to us. Speak through us. Amen.

Most of our other spiritual practices have been activities, although also orientations. Blessing is a way of being, and thinking, and seeing.

Yet I’ve always thought of it as something you give, or ask for.
How did we pray as children?–

“God, bless mommy, and daddy, and sissy and the fishy...”

But more recently I’ve realized, we don’t have to ask God to bless this or that. God wants to bless. God wants us to invite the blessing. And the more we’re aware of it, the more we receive.

I was always asking for blessing – then one day I had a revelation. My beloved cat had gone into heart failure some weeks earlier, and been brought back from the brink. But this day her breathing was funny again, and I made an appointment with the vet for that afternoon. As I was waiting, I went to work, anxious. I remember walking down the stairs at my church to my office, praying, “Please God, please God, please God,” and suddenly these words came into my mind: **“Expect blessing.”** Because blessing is God’s nature. God is in the business of blessing. There will be always be blessing – we don’t get to specify, and sometimes it’s in an area other than where we crave it, but we can expect blessing. It revolutionized the way I thought of God’s activity. And the way I pray.

Then this week in prayer I had a further awareness – we are awash in blessing. We are walking in blessing, swimming in blessing.

It’s less like watering a plant, and more like swimming.

It’s like a fish asking where water is – water is what supports your life.

Prayer is not about our trying to get God to change something – Payer is putting ourselves in the space where God can change us, inviting God to change our orientation, open our awareness. Nowadays I sometimes still pray, “please, please, please,” but more often it’s, “God, please release your blessing, release your healing; your forgiveness. Show me the obstacles and help me take them down.” That’s how we can become people of blessing.

And we are called to be people of blessing – to bless is an active thing. Jesus told this parable when a lawyer asked him one day how to inherit eternal life. After ascertaining that the man knew not only the rules, but the heart of the law, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself,” Jesus said, “You’re fine!” But the man wasn’t satisfied... maybe he was looking for a loophole? But he asked, “Then who is my neighbor?” And Jesus told a story about a man being beaten and robbed on a dangerous road – Just saying, “A man was going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho” would have gotten a reaction from his listeners. That road was notorious for bandits and robbers and worse.

So the man is set upon, and left beaten, half-dead. Two men come by, a priest and a Levite, and do not stop. No doubt they had important religious work to do. Maybe they couldn’t risk defilement if the man was dead. Maybe they’re afraid of being attacked themselves if they stop. We don’t know – Jesus just says the religious leaders keep walking. The one who stops is a Samaritan – to that audience, a less than desirable ethnicity. He stops and checks, finds the man still alive, uses his own resources – oil and wine – to clean his wounds, puts him on his own mule, which slows him down and puts him at greater risk – and gets him to an inn, where he cares for him. When he needs to go, he leaves resources to cover the man’s care until he is fully well. He is compassionate, organized and thorough.

Jesus says that the neighbor in that story is not the man beaten and robbed; it is the Samaritan, the outcast, of whom they thought the worst things. He was an agent of blessing, not the religious leaders who passed by before. He gave of his resources, he took great risks, and he saw the need through.

That is how we are to be agents of blessing –
Aware of how we are swimming in blessing, we bless –
We give beyond what we think we can - here, and to strangers;
We work for healing and restoration of people and nations;
We are organized, compassionate and thorough – we see the project through.
We are called to be a church of blessing.

And then we also speak blessing, using our words to make whole.

We all know of the damage critical or abusive words can do – a child told she is stupid will think she is, or careless will grow up that way.

Words of affirmation have similar power to build up, to make people more than they thought they could be. Can you remember a time someone spoke life to you by the way they described you, or qualities they saw in you, or affirmed you? Who around you needs the blessing of your words?

So, we have these four verbs:

- ◆ Expect
- ◆ Give
- ◆ Speak
- ◆ Be blessing

We are to live expecting blessing to fill and surround us, no matter where we find it;

We are to offer blessing by our actions and in our generous giving;

We are to speak people into wholeness with our words.

And we are to simply be the blessing God is releasing into this world.

Amen.

Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'