***BLESSED TO BLESS***

John C. Peterson

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Staunton, VA

November 6, 2022

Texts: Psalm 145:1-13 and Ephesians 1:3-10

*I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.*

*Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.*

So sings the psalmist – words of blessing, words of gratitude, words of awed praise, words of commitment – *every day, forever and ever, I will bless your name*. The psalmist blesses the Lord because the psalmist feels blessed ***by*** the Lord. He counts his blessings and recognizes from whom they come, and those blessings inspire the blessings he offers to God. Do you know what it is to be so blessed – to feel so blessed by God that your heart and lips erupt in praise and blessing? And if you do know what it is to be so blessed, how then **do** you bless God?

 The story is told of a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his backpack with a bag of potato chips and a couple boxes of apple juice and started out. About three blocks from his home, he was passing through a park when he saw an old woman sitting on a bench staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down beside her and stared at the pigeons too. After a few moments, he opened his backpack, took out his juice and was about to take a sip when he noticed that the woman looked hungry, so he reached into his pack and offered her some chips. She gratefully accepted and smiled at him. Her smile was so pleasant that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a box of juice. Again, she accepted and smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there for a time just eating and sipping and smiling, but they never said a word.

 After a long while, the boy realized he was getting tired and got up to leave. He had gone only a few steps when he turned, ran back to the old woman, and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile yet! When the boy opened the door to his house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the smile on his face. She asked, “What did you do today that made you so happy?” He replied, “I had lunch with God.” Before his mother could respond, he added, “You know what? She has the most beautiful smile!”

 Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and asked, “Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?” She replied, “I ate chips in the park with God.” And before her son could respond, she added, “You know, he’s much younger than I expected.”

 What I love about that story is that both the young boy and the old woman were blessed at the same time that they were blessing the other. Each experienced God in the person and presence of the other; it was a mutual blessing and perhaps, a way in which God too was blessed. For we who are blessed by God are called by God to be blessings to one another and in so doing we bless the God who is the source of all our blessings.

 The starting point for the psalmist and for us is the recognition not only of our blessings, but also of the God who blesses us. The psalmist finds those blessings across his life

in the stories of what God has done for God’s people across the ages,

in the wonder and beauty of creation,

in the compassion which God has shown toward God’s people,

in the power of God at work in wild and wonderful ways,

in the simple pleasures of life that are so often taken for granted, and

in the hope God offers with the dawn of each new day.

Notably the psalmist does not run down a list of possessions that are blessings – 2 donkeys, 6 sheep, a bag full of shekels, a particularly good pomegranate. He recognizes that God’s blessings are much bigger in scope, the stuff of life and love, hope and peace. In other times and places, he will find those blessings to include

the wide expanse of the night sky,

the power of storms and the enduring hulk of mountains,

the enjoyment of daily food and drink,

the love of family and friends,

the assurance of protection from enemies, and

the promise of God’s love which never ends.

Those blessings bear witness to the greatness of God and to the greatness of God’s love for humankind in general and for the psalmist in particular. It is that awe-filled recognition that leads the psalmist to grateful praise.

 If we do not find ourselves so deeply moved, perhaps it is because we take for granted our blessings; we don’t see them, or we fail to recognize God as the source from whom they flow. What spurs the psalmist to offer praise and blessing escapes our notice. We see the road ahead of us but miss the glory of autumn all around us. We take for granted friendships until we desperately need a friend, and then that friendship becomes a treasure. We profess faith with our lips, but find our hearts little stirred until there is a crisis in which we cry out to the Lord for help. Like a fish that never notices the water in which it lives, we never notice our blessings until they are suddenly threatened or taken away, and then we long for them to be restored. We leave it to poets, artists, musicians, and children to point out the wonder of it all, while we go obliviously through our daily routines.

So then:

Listen to the child:

*Dear God, I didn’t think that purple and orange went together until I saw the sunset last night! Wow! Your friend, Danny*

Listen to the poet:

*Why do people keep asking to see*

*God’s identity papers*

*when the darkness opening into morning*

*is more than enough?*

*Certainly any god might turn away in disgust.*

*Think of Sheba approaching*

*the kingdom of Solomon.*

*Do you think she had to ask,*

*“Is this the place?”[[1]](#endnote-1)*

Listen to the musician:

*When in our music God is glorified,*

*and adoration leaves no room for pride,*

*it is as though the whole creation cried: Alleluia![[2]](#endnote-2)*

Look at the work of the artists

– in these banners,

 on this parament and stole,

 on this communion cloth.

Hear the words of the psalmist:

 *All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,*

*and all your faithful shall bless you.*

Why should we be the exception – the works that fail to give thanks to God, the faithful who fail to bless the Lord – unless we fail to see ourselves as works of God, unless we fail to be among the Lord’s faithful! We are blessed so that we can enjoy our blessings – absolutely – but not so that we can wallow in them; we are blessed so that we may bless others and bless God. We bless others by sharing our blessings, by freely giving of ourselves not because we have to, but because we can! We bless others

by something as simple as listening, really listening to them,

by being present with them when they need a companion,

by offering a helping hand or wise counsel,

by sharing our monies in order to meet their needs,

by baking a cake or raking leaves or offering a ride,

by sharing a few potato chips on a park bench with a stranger who just

might be God!

We bless others by loving them as Jesus called us to do, and in so doing, we also bless God. “As you have done for the least of these, my brothers and sisters, so you have done for me,” says the king in Jesus’ parable.

 Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians with words of blessing: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ*…” He begins by blessing God and will conclude by asking God’s blessing upon the Ephesians. We join the saints before us in blessing God by living as God calls us to live and loving as God calls us to love, by offering to God our thanks and praise from hearts overflowing with gratitude, by seeing God’s gift of the colors orange and purple in our midst, by handing down to the next generation the faith we hold, by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with a world desperately in need of news that is good, and in the words of the psalmist, by making known to all people God’s mighty deeds and the glorious splendor of God’s kingdom.

 Today we come to offer commitments to God for 2023; I wonder: do the commitments you wrote down reflect the depth of your gratitude for your blessings – or not? Do they in any way bless God – or just offer a tip to the divine bellhop who waits to serve you? Do you make those commitments with joy or just to fulfill an obligation? God does not seem hesitant to bless us; why then should we be hesitant to bless God? “Every day I will bless you,” sings the psalmist. “Every day!” May this be a day that you too bless the Lord! And may tomorrow be another such day of blessing, and the day after that too, and the day after that, and the day after that, and the day after that….Amen

1. Mary Oliver, “I Wake Close to Morning” in *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*, Penguin Books:2017, p.3 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Fred Pratt Green, “When in Our Music God is Glorified”, Hope Publishing Company:1972 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)