

## Trusting the Blessing

*February 11, 2007*  
*6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany*  
*Trusting the Blessing*

*Jeremiah 17:5-10*  
*Psalm 1*  
*Luke 6: 20-26*

It's unusual to have our two scripture readings and responsive psalm so in tune with each other as they are this morning – the evocative image of fruitful trees planted by water; the shocking series of blessing and curses or woes – and most important, the underlying conviction that those who trust in God are blessed.

The biblical notion of being blessed is not at all like the worldly notion. Ever since human beings got a taste of wealth, power and privilege, the worldly notion of being blessed has had to do with being successful and rich, achieving status and honour, enjoying not just a comfortable life, but an excessively affluent life. The worldly notion of being blessed is usually reserved for an elite few and comes at the expense, on the backs of the many who are denied worldly blessing by unjust systems and structures. Worldly blessing is often seen as a reward worth competing, even fighting for.

The biblical notion of being blessed has to do with embracing God's values, living God's vision, depending on God to provide and sustain, in short, entrusting one's life to God. Biblical blessing is not a reward for particular behaviour – it is the result, the outcome of choosing God, of trusting God.

Hebrew scripture is full of references describing wealth as a blessing from God. Trouble surfaces when we human beings allow wealth to tempt us to turn away from trusting God and turn against one another.

The prophet Jeremiah, the psalmist and the gospel writer Luke keep trying to show us that the reign of God, the fulfillment of the will of God, the realization of the shalom vision of God are not merely challenging the worldly notion of blessing, but are actually turning the worldly blessing upside down, along with worldly values, structures and systems.

The Beatitudes are often interpreted in personal terms as a mandate for individual human morality. It is all too easy to hear in them a threatening tone of judgement or punishment. This doesn't begin to grasp the fullness or cosmic dimension of Luke's message.

Luke wants us to hear Jesus announcing, through the Beatitudes, the end of worldly systems of power and privilege. Luke wants us to hear Jesus declaring God's Jubilee agenda of a dramatic change or reversal that will lead to hope, healing, new life, abundant life especially for those who have suffered or struggled or been denied their fair share or rightful place under the worldly structures and systems.

The hope, of course is that we will not just listen to these words, but that we will trust them and with their help, come to trust God more fully and more deeply. Trust doesn't come instantly or easily, just because of what the Bible or a preacher says. It is a process that we move through in stages.

First we learn, we come to know in an intellectual sense who God is and what it means for us to trust God. After this, we have to decide whether to trust God. When we do choose to trust God,

then and only then do we move into the experience of trust and discover for ourselves what it means to trust God, and in the trusting, what it means to be blessed by God.

Trusting in God is not a linear, straightforward process. It is like walking the path of a labyrinth. The path that leads to the centre but with many twists and turns along the way. Sometimes we are so close, sometimes we seem so far away from trusting God. At any point you can turn around and walk out of the labyrinth, without ever reaching the centre. At any point we can turn around and walk away from trusting God.

Trusting in God is something we are encouraged to do as individuals. We are also encouraged to trust God as a community, in community. Trust is at the heart of worship – our need for it, our longing, our resistance to it, our best effort in the presence God whose love, grace and mercy are worthy of our trust – it's all expressed in our hymns and prayers; our rituals and reflections.

It's what we are about when we gather in this sanctuary each Sunday morning. And it's why last fall we began a monthly quiet service of discernment on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday before the Executive meeting. The next one is this Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:45 here in this Chancel. Worship provides us the opportunity to seek and build trust.

Community worship is essential, but it is not enough. It is too easy to get distracted or discouraged after we leave this sanctuary and the company of one another. Trusting in God takes a lifetime, a lifetime of intentional daily practice.

You may have already developed your own personal practice to do precisely this. This morning I invite you to add to your own resources, to our shared resources the blue insert that provides a prayer to begin the day and a prayer to end the day. I urge us, all of us, to take a few moments at the start and end of each day to offer this prayer.

It's not that God will pay more attention to us if we do this together. Here is a way for us to connect with each other while we are apart, to encourage and support each other in our efforts to embrace God's values, to live God's vision, to depend on God to provide and sustain us, to entrust our lives to God – our individual lives, the life of our community.

When you sit down to pray, somebody in this community will likely be finishing their prayer, ready to hand it over to you. As you pray, somebody else will be in joining you and as you finish somebody will be just starting, ready to carry on where you left off. What a powerful experience it will be for us if as a community we decide to pray for the grace to trust God and entrust our lives to God each and every day.

Earlier this morning, Ruth Wilson, chair of our Joint Needs Assessment Committee reported to us JNAC's readiness to engage us all in a process of visioning and JNAC's recommendation that a short term contract be developed to hire someone on an interim basis when Marylil Megginson retires at the end of June. We find ourselves at a critical moment of discernment and decision-making. We stand on the threshold, hearing Christ's call to walk boldly into God's future, preparing ourselves to make the wise, creative and faithful decisions that will enable us to cross over that threshold. This is an exciting time in the life of Sydenham Street United Church. This is a scary time!

Pray this prayer of trust in the morning and the evening, every day as we move through this exciting, scary time, and I know that as we become more trusting of God, we will become

clearer, stronger, braver people. We will become more loving, more daring, more faithful, more alive.

Blessed are those who trust in God! Amen

***A Morning Prayer***

Go to a welcoming place and make yourself comfortable.

Bring with you something that reminds you or connects you with God – a flower, a small picture or piece of art . . .

Play a favourite piece of music softly. Light a Candle.

Quiet yourself with steady, deep breaths.

Read some words of scripture:

Psalm 23,            Isaiah 40:28-31    Isaiah 43:1-7  
Matthew 7:7-11    John 15:12-17    Romans 8:31-39  
a favourite passage

Think about the coming day. Picture the people you expect to see, the situations you expect to face, what's happening close to home and far beyond.

Offer the following prayer

***O God, as I look ahead to the coming day, help me to entrust all that will happen into your loving care. Show me how to live this day according to your will, trusting always in your grace, your mercy and your love, open always to your spirit.***

***I ask this in the name of Jesus and pray as he did with his friends,***

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.***

Sit quietly for a few more moments. Carry on with your day.

*Sydenham Street United Church, February 2007*

## *An Evening Prayer*

Go to a welcoming place and make yourself comfortable.

Bring with you something that reminds you or connects you with God – a flower, a small picture or piece of art . . .

Play a favourite piece of music softly. Light a Candle.

Quiet yourself with steady, deep breaths.

Read some words of scripture:

Psalm 23,	Psalm 138	Isaiah 43:1-7
Matthew 11:28-30	John 14:27	Philippians 4:4-9
a favourite passage		

Think about the day that has just passed. Picture the people you saw, the situations you encountered, what happened close to home and far beyond.

Offer the following prayer

*O God, as I look back on this day, help me to entrust all that has happened into your loving care. Celebrate with me the joys of this day. Bring healing and forgiveness for the hurts of this day. Be with and bless all those I hold in my heart and mind. Grant them and me your peace.*

*I ask this in the name of Jesus and pray as he did with his friends,*

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

Sit quietly for a few more moments as you end this day

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