

## **“Blessings”**

The Rev. L. K. Crowe

June 12, 2016

### **Scripture:**

### **Psalm 103 (NRSV)**

#### **Thanksgiving for God’s Goodness**

<sup>1</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

<sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—

<sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

<sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

<sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

<sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

<sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.

<sup>10</sup> He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

<sup>11</sup> For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

<sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

<sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

<sup>14</sup> For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.

<sup>15</sup> As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field;

<sup>16</sup> for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

<sup>17</sup> But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children,

<sup>18</sup> to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

<sup>19</sup> The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

<sup>20</sup> Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word.

<sup>21</sup> Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will.

<sup>22</sup> Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul.

### **The Sermon:**

Still-speaking God, we come before you once again, asking that you open our minds and hearts. Please grant us wisdom and understanding of your word to us this day. Thank you. Amen.

Three baby quilts are here this morning to serve as visual aids for this sermon about blessings. The first baby quilt was just finished this week—it is the bright quilt hanging on the display rack. This quilt has been made as a blessing for a baby who will arrive in August, the child of Emma Eisenhauer and Dusty Gochese. Because Emma is the mother-to-be, this quilt called for vibrant colors and irregular, improvisational quilting. This is the brightest quilt I have ever made, and sewing it was a delight!

The other two baby quilts are much older. One quilt is composed of tiny pastel hexagons and diamond-shaped pieces. This pattern is a variation of “Grandmother’s Flower Garden.” Every stitch in this little quilt was done by hand. This quilt was made almost 70 years ago by my paternal grandmother, Isabel Hamm. Grandma Hamm sent this hand-stitched blessing from Kansas City to North Dakota when my older sister Carol was born. This baby quilt was used by all six of the Hamm siblings; it is threadbare, but it is a precious treasure.

The oldest quilt is about 150 years old. This little quilt is a Triple Irish Chain pattern; it was given to me 47 years ago, when I was pregnant, by my maternal grandmother, Grace Potts. This quilt originally came from Grandma’s stepmother’s family, the Clogstons, in Iowa. My mother, and all of her siblings, slept under this baby quilt. This quilt is also well-worn, but the hand stitching is still absolutely beautiful.

In the summer of 1969, when Grandma Grace gave me this baby quilt, I realized that it was a blessing—a blessing for the baby who was to come, and a blessing for Randy and me. Did

Grandma have any idea how much I would treasure this little quilt? This quilt is a precious blessing, given by a beloved grandmother to a granddaughter, a blessing to be used by a great-grandbaby who was on the way.

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, when our beautiful baby girl arrived, Randy made phone calls to all the relatives, including Grandma Grace. He told Grandma that we had named the baby Amy Grace. Amy Grace was the very first baby to be named after Grandma. Naming our little daughter after Grandma meant so very much to Grandma—it was an important blessing for my dear grandmother.

Today I have shared these quilts and stories with you as I invite you to consider blessings—blessings given and blessings received, blessings that have been spoken aloud, and blessings that have been lived.

A verbal blessing may be as short and simple as “Bless you!” when someone sneezes. A spoken blessing may be filled with humor or wisdom, such as the Irish blessing, “May you be in heaven half an hour before the Devil knows you’re dead!” A verbal blessing may be a grace shared before a meal, or a benediction such as *“May God bless you and keep you, may God’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you, may God look upon you with kindness and give you peace.”* (Numbers 6:24-26) A spoken blessing may be wishing happiness or good health upon another. We may learn, as young children, to say such blessings in our prayers: “God bless all the people I love, God bless the whole wide world, and God bless me, beloved child of God.” A spoken blessing may serve to make holy an object, or a situation, or a place. Blessings shared aloud are the first kind of blessings to consider today.

Next are the blessings we experience. I recall the words of Moshe Schuster a man who served as a tour guide on a trip to the Holy Land. Each evening Moshe would say, in his deep voice, “Today we have been blessed by God to...” and he would follow that with a list of all that we had experienced that day, all that we had seen, all that we had done.

As we consider blessings, we must look at life experiences and opportunities. A blessing can be as simple as observing a tiny hummingbird, or smelling a rose. A blessing can be as beautiful as a sunset, or a sea shore, or a mountain. A blessing can be as profoundly moving as being present at the birth of a baby; a blessing can be as holy as being present when someone is dying. Perhaps it was these experiences Rabbi Abraham Heschel had in mind

when he remarked, “Just to live is holy; just to be is a blessing.” The experiences and opportunities of life add up to blessings. Perhaps you are a person who has said, “I am not rich in material wealth or things, but I have been so richly blessed in this life!”

Consider now an additional understanding of blessing—blessings that have to do with human relationships. Consider how other people have provided blessings for you, as well as how you, yourself, have been a blessing to others.

This week I finished reading a book of stories written by Rachel Naomi Remen. The book is titled “*My Grandfather’s Blessings*”, and it is about the blessings found in human relationships. Remen writes of how it is that human beings bless life and one another. Remen first began to learn about blessings from her grandfather, when she was a very small child.

Remen writes of service as a blessing—service that may be small and quiet, service that is everywhere. “We serve by who we are, and not by what we know,” says Remen. “And everyone serves whether they know it or not...we bless the life around us far more than we realize. Many simple ordinary things that we do affect those around us in profound ways: the unexpected phone call, the brief touch, the willingness to listen generously, the warm smile or wink of recognition. We can even bless total strangers, and be blessed by them.”

Remen wrote that there is a greeting commonly used in India. On meeting others, even a total stranger, one bows and says, “Namaste.” Namaste means, “I see the divine spark within you.” “Namaste”—in spite of your appearance, your age or illness or anger or meanness, in spite of all that, I recognize that there is in everyone a place of goodness and integrity, no matter how deeply buried. “Namaste...” when we recognize the spark of God in others, we blow on that spark with our attention—we strengthen that spark, no matter how deeply it has been buried, or for how long. “When we bless someone, we touch the unborn goodness in them, and (we) wish it well.”

Rachel Remen wrote that everything unborn in us and in the world needs blessing. Her beloved grandfather told her that the Holy has made all things. Her grandfather told Rachel that it is up to us to strengthen and feed them and free them whenever possible to find and fulfill (God’s) purposes for them. **Blessings strengthen life; blessings feed life.**

Once a woman told Rachel Remen that she didn't feel the need to reach out to people around her because she prayed every day, and surely this was enough. But Remen answered that **prayer is about our relationship to God; a blessing is about our relationship to the spark of God in one another.** "God may not need our attention as badly as the person next to us on the bus or behind us in line at the supermarket. Everyone in the world matters, and so do their blessings. When we bless others, we offer them refuge from an indifferent world."

**Rachel Remen's grandfather told her, "We need to remember to bless the life around us and within us...when we bless others, we free the goodness in them and in ourselves. When we bless life, we restore the world."**

Today I have invited you to consider blessings. For just a moment now, consider how it is that you can bless the people around you. Thoughtfully consider how it is that you bless the world, by what you say and what you do. Consider the blessings that you share, in the context of our call, as Christians, to be in community. Consider blessings in light of Jesus' words about loving God, and loving each other.

"Namaste" may not be the way that we greet one another, in this region and in this culture. But "Namaste" applies to us. **Our words and our actions enable us to say that we see the spark of God within another person. What we do and what we say allow us to bless the lives of others, and to acknowledge the bit of God that we recognize in others.**

We live in a world hungry for blessings. May God guide us to be blessings, blessings to one another and to the world. And may God bless you—each and every one of you, beloved children of God, may God bless you! Amen.