

# “God Bless Us, Every One”

## WORDS of FAITH: BLESSED

Matthew 5:3-10 and Genesis 12:1-2

Sunday, October 8, 2017

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

Rev. Charlie Berthoud

*In this WORDS of FAITH series, our hope is that you'll take some time to reflect on our distinct vocabulary. We've already focused on KINGDOM, LOVE, WORLD, and SABBATH. Today our focus is on the word BLESSED.*

*In the first reading, you heard how Jesus offers blessings—to people who don't always seem to be blessed: the mourners, the peacemakers, the pure in heart. In his life and ministry, he blessed people with God's love. All people, not just the religious and political elites. This was a surprise.*

*Many years prior to Jesus a couple named Abram and Sarai were blessed by God, also in a surprising way.*

*They were old and thought they wouldn't have any children. But God promised them a child and made the astounding promise that their descendants would be as numerous as the stars. This blessing wasn't necessarily easy. God sent them to a new land, and they faced new challenges.*

*This surprise blessing of children wasn't just to make a family; it was for a purpose. Listen for God's word.*

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

"God bless us, every one," so says Tiny Tim at the conclusion of *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens. It's one of the best known lines in literature.

But is it an intercession? "God, please bless everyone" Or is it an affirmation? "God has blessed all of us, everyone of us, even me with my crutch and with our family in poverty." Maybe it is both, asking God to bless everyone and a recognition of abundant blessings.

Sometimes we fail to recognize the ways that we are blessed. There's an old gospel song called "Count Your Blessings."

When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

*Refrain:*

Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
Count your blessings, see what God has done!

So I started counting our blessings. Here's my list of Top Ten Ways we are blessed at Covenant Presbyterian Church

B<sub>3</sub> L<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> D<sub>2</sub> 10. Baptisms!



B<sub>3</sub> L<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> D<sub>2</sub> 9. New Members



B<sub>3</sub> L<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> D<sub>2</sub> 8. Awesome Staff



B<sub>3</sub> L<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> E<sub>1</sub> D<sub>2</sub> 7. A great building



B, L, E, S, S, E, D, 6. Young adult ministry



B, L, E, S, S, E, D, 5. Varied and Inspiring Music



B, L, E, S, S, E, D, 4. Children



B, L, E, S, S, E, D, 3. Youth



B, L, E, S, S, E, D, 2. Great people



B, L, E, S, S, E, D, 1. Community



We are blessed as a church.

It's good for us to count our blessings and to be thankful, but we can't stop there. We need to take the next step.

Like Abram and Sarai, we have been blessed for a reason, to be a blessing to others. We don't simply exist to be a good group of people that gathers together in this place and thanks God for blessing us.

We are blessed so that we can make a difference out there.

We are blessed to live as new people.

We are blessed to be a blessing.

So for instance, we have been blessed so that we can generously support the work of partners in the areas, who are doing their best against hunger, poverty, domestic violence and more.

The Road Home is one example. Several times a year this church is home for families who don't have a home. We open classrooms where people sleep, we provide meals, we offer games for the kids and conversation for the adults.

We have been blessed so that we can partner with Glenn Stephens Elementary, to encourage the teachers, students, and staff. We dropped off about 600 apples last Monday, for a healthy snack. We have dozens of people serving as Pen Pals. We collect school supplies. We delivered a check for \$7200 (from our Capital Campaign) for new computers.

We have been blessed so that we can financially and prayerfully support life changing work in Guatemala and South Sudan and Kenya and Haiti, through the Presbyterian Church USA. We support education, health care, and church leadership development. We support Presbyterian World Mission.

We have been blessed so that this building is not only a refuge and shelter for us, but also a place for Cub Scouts and Boys Scouts, for AA and Al-Anon, community groups like neighborhood associations, and more. Community leaders like Police Chief Mike Koval and Boys and Girls Club President Michael Johnson have been here to help Madison wrestle with complicated social issues. We use our building to strengthen our church community, but also to be a neighborhood resource.

Most importantly we have been blessed so that we, in our daily lives, in our everyday routines can be blessings to other people. As a church, we try to help people recognize God's blessings and then be blessings to others.

Members of this church are putting their faith in action. People from Covenant:

Are teachers and professors, helping the next generations to learn and explore

Are lawyers, and doctors, and computer people, civil servants, and students, and retirees, doing great things

Are working at non-profits and doing great volunteer work

Are loving family members, doing their best to be forgiving kind and gracious with loved ones

Are caring people, reaching out to lonely and sad people

Are carrying heavy burdens of grief, substance abuse, challenging relationships and even with those burdens, they are helping others

This church helps people to do all those things better—with courage, with clarity, with persistence, with love.

This church helps us to LEARN about God's love and the go out and LIVE God's love in our routines and daily living.

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Stewardship Sunday is just three weeks away. This week, members and friends should get a packet in the mail about our church, with an invitation to make a pledge to the operating budget for 2018. By doing so, you will help multiply the blessings, for the people of this church and then for the community.

Making a pledge to the operating budget is really important, no matter what the size. We live in a time when more and more people want to designate their giving. So we have funds that are focused on music, or mission, or the building. And those are all wonderful.

But if everyone designated their giving for paper clips or for new flowers, or for new ukuleles, we'd be in trouble. We really appreciate your undesignated giving to the mission and ministry of Covenant.

We have a wonderful history of generosity, which has set a good foundation for us. Our task is to keep the foundation strong for the future.

For next year, we are hoping to grow our mission, including support for a new ministry with young adults in Madison, through John Knox Presbytery and the Lilly Endowment.



We are hoping to strengthen our pastoral care and grow our fellowship. Just this past week, I spoke with a relatively new member who hasn't felt as connected as she had hoped. As new people keep coming and as our culture is changing, we need to find new and better ways to help people get connected.

We are hoping to improve our technology, to get more people involved in events and activities through social media and online signups, and we need to improve our webpage.

I am hopeful that we can build on all the good things here, and do an even better job at changing lives with God's love, so that people can go out there and make a difference.

So I am excited about the possibilities for next year. I've been here almost five years, and I'm as energized and hopeful as I was when I got here. I see lives being changed with God's love.

I am convinced that Madison is a better place because of Covenant Presbyterian Church.

I am convinced that the world is a better place because of Covenant Presbyterian Church.

God has blessed us richly here at Covenant. Together, we make the blessings multiply out in the world.

Let us pray.