

Make Me a Blessing

Trinity XVII , 2016

“And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20)

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. (Matt 25:42, 43)

[...the church leaders in Jerusalem desired] that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do. (Gal. 2:10)

“For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.”(Deut. 15:11)

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (James 1:7)

I want to start out today’s sermon with a premise regarding our lives as believers. It is an encouraging and empowering one.

When Jesus was about to depart to His Heavenly Father, the Gospels say *he breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost* (John 20:22). Luke adds these words: *“And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”* (24:49) In Acts 1, we remember Jesus’ further instruction to the gathered disciples: *...wait for the promise of the Father, which, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence* (vv. 4, 5). This promise was soon fulfilled visibly, and mightily, on the day of Pentecost. There are many other records in Acts, as you know, attesting to the same occurrence in different circumstances.

St. Paul reminds us of the nature and ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives:

[I make] mention of you in my prayers; that ye may know... what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead... (from Eph. 1).

The point here is that Christian baptism has granted us heavenly enablement. These are supernatural abilities, imparted by the presence of God’s Spirit. This is my starting place.

But power must find some means of expression. A whole host of electrical apparatuses simply sit there, gathering dust, until they are plugged in. Once plugged in, they can then be utilized toward the ends for which they’ve been designed. And it is a joy and a pleasure to see them fulfilling their purpose.

We, too, have been provided with divine graces that are intended for specific applications. They reflect the nature, character, and intents of the One who bestowed them. It is no surprise,

then, that chief among those purposes is *to love*. It is the subject of many sermons to discuss how such love is to be expressed within the community of believers. But today I wish to focus on those outside the church who surround us. My purpose is to urge us to make use of what God has given us. Allow me to say that this is both a calling and a duty: *For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more* (Luke 12:48).

But it is also a joy. Heavenly power made use of means results that surpass the natural. Do you doubt it? Do you realize how much your smile, your benediction, your kind word, your Christ-filled attitude, your personal blessing mean to those who surround you? Any boat leaves a wake behind it. It is evidence that the boat has passed through its surroundings. When the Christian allows his sails to be filled with the winds of God, he leaves behind him a wake whose ripples spread out ever more widely into the troubled waters of this world through which he travels.

This, however, is not an automatic process. It involves a conscious decision to make this a priority. It means the constant discipline of looking outward, rather than inward, regardless of how busy we are, and how pressing and immediate are our concerns. There is no earthly obligation of any sort whatsoever that can assume priority over the commandments to *love God* and *love our neighbors as ourselves*. You and I are stewards of this remarkable ability we've been given. We can withhold or dispense it at will. Much of the time, we withhold it, not even realizing it.

I am moving toward a certain point, I admit, in this sermon. We talk about wanting to grow as a church. We bemoan the fact that our numbers aren't increasing. This applies to us a very uncomfortable and discouraging sort of pressure. Just a few days back, I was asked to perform a graveside service of a former Waterville parishioner, which I was happy to do. It was a privilege and a pleasure to assist her family at a needy time. But I had to admit that in my experience thus far as a traditional Anglican, I've witnessed far more funerals than weddings and baptisms.

Should we be graced by any additions to our numbers here, especially if they are younger people, they will want to see straight off if we are a church that is going somewhere: are we forward-looking, do we have something for people to *do* to express their faith?

My feeling about this is that until we are able to establish organized ministries here, which is a matter of time and more participants, we can set a pace even now by our individual expressions of our faith. Let me suggest some possibilities. A quick online check reveals 34 nursing homes in the Hancock County area. There are other opportunities for service, including Hospice Volunteers of Maine, and the Washington-Hancock Community Agency. In many if not most

of these cases, it is a matter of first praying for guidance, then telling your feet to walk there, and then doing whatever God provides, with His power and help.

It doesn't have to be a lot. God takes a little, and makes it into much. Just watch! My own efforts in this area have focused lately on hospital visitation, as often as I can. Part of a morning; part of an afternoon. Just a few meaningful contacts with a few needy people. You and I have something that they need. No one else can give it. Hours of lonely TV viewing certainly won't provide it. Agenda-driven staff who may be more trained in professional technique than in the rudiments of love won't do it. Neither can vastly overworked and underpaid workers, nor can frustrated, anxious family members. But all — staff and clients alike— will light up at your arrival, especially when you've proven what sort of God-given virtues you possess!

It is as easy as yielding to it. And it is as impossible and undoable as refusing to even consider it. There are no experts in love. There are no advanced degrees offered in it. There are only those who have allowed their lives to school them in it, and have successfully fought and defeated their own unwillingness to express it.

The consequence of our each fulfilling our callings will be the increase of Christian life right here in our fellowship. It will render us attractive to those who are seeking a family of believers to be part of. And lest we be ashamed when they arrive at our doors, we want to be able to demonstrate in palpable ways the progress we've made toward obeying the very most basic commandments of our Lord.

And, the Lord knows, there are even tougher fields of ministry around us —very, very nearby— that are crying out for workers: broken families, drug addiction, economic privation, to name a few. We must pray our way to being available for these needs, and to bring to our fellowship others who may be especially competent and gifted to work in them.

Now none of the above may seem as if it would be directly effective toward increasing our membership here. But I believe that as we move through obedience toward God, He will move commensurately toward us to answer the very prayers we continually pray to Him.

It is my hope to provide us with phone numbers and contact information for the opportunities noted above. If, God willing, you should make a contact, and find there a place for Christian service, we want to —we *need* to— hear all about it. It will be a vast encouragement to us all.

Do you remember the closing phrase from last week's Epistle?:

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Eph. 3:20, 21).

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.