

Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
November 17, 2013

Psalm 103, Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 6:17, 20-23  
"Blessed are the Blessed"

My sermon title, "Blessed are the Blessed," is a bit unusual. It spins off the Beatitudes just read by Tani. The Beatitudes are blessings of conditions and results. For instance, "Blessed are the peacemakers (condition) for they will be called children of God (result).

Last Sunday I quoted Paul saying, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

I asked: Why would Paul encourage us to be thankful when we are anxious?

I went on to say that, maybe he wants to deflect us from our worries. There's an old time hymn called "Count Your Blessings" which turns us from the worries and cares of the world to the many blessings God gives us. In thinking about our blessings, we are thankful.

I added that if there was anyone who had reason to worry and be anxious in the last years of her life it was Klara Larsen. She could hardly move and speak in her final months and spent most of the time in bed. The way she came alive was in singing and one of her favorite songs was "Count Your Blessings."

We didn't sing this song last week so I chose it for today to accompany my reflections on blessings. Since today is Stewardship Commitment Sunday, I thought it appropriate to count our blessings.

An additional Beatitude could say, "Blessed are the blessed for they are God's happy, blissful and fortunate ones." The term *beatitude* comes from the [Latin](#) adjective *beātitudō*, which means "happy", "fortunate", or "blissful".

Stephanie and I visited Marian Judd in the ICU on Thursday. Thank God, she was recovering well after a week of considerable pain following surgery to vertebra in her back. She was sitting up and reading get well cards. She expressed gratitude for the cards and mentioned how hard it must be for people who do not have family. Marian was grateful for her immediate family and her church family.

Just last week Melissa and Tani expressed how fortunate we are to be part of God's church family. We heard repeatedly how blessed are. We have had quite a few deaths in this church in the past few years and I have been with every

person in the last months and days of their life and in each case they have been buoyed and carried from this life into the next with the assurance that God goes with them and before them and greets them in God's eternal home. Every one of them expressed their love and appreciation of this church. Each expressed in their own way their blessedness.

The Beatitudes in Matthew and Luke are Jesus' ideals for Christian living and since I am speaking of death let us look at Matthew's second Beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Mari, my spiritual office administrator, shared the insight that we are blessed as mourners because we truly loved the person who died. Because we loved much, we mourn. We are blessed because we knew great love.

There are many ways to count our blessings. There is much to be thankful for outside and inside the church. The first and most obvious area to be thankful for as members of the church is weekly worship and this applies to every church. Weekly worship is a given. It is one thing every member can count on. We are stewards of our spiritual growth through worship. We love the communal gathering, the prayers, the words and the music.

The next important thing is our mission: The many ways we give and support mission locally and abroad. We feed the hungry, take care of the earth and support the denomination in a multitude of ministries. We are stewards of our mission consciousness and our giving. We are engaged in a variety of other worthwhile activities, such as, pastoral care, praying in the prayer chain, education, fellowship, social functions, outings, print and online communications.

We appreciate the tremendous leadership in this church and the many who have gone before us. Our stewardship theme this year is "Branch out with Faith." It was a theme of our stewardship drive many years ago. On the fall cleaning day, Debbie found a bunch of stationary with this logo on it and we thought it appropriate to resurface the theme for this year's drive.

Tani Girton, our Finance chair and liturgist today, spoke to the theme beautifully in her stewardship letter. She wrote: "*Branch out with Faith* is a song from our past, the faithful members who passed this church on to us so we can affirm our faith and the life of the church. Our tree of faith is developing new branches all the time – often the core is being strengthened even before we can see the signs of new growth.

"Each year we renew our commitment to God and our mission. It is an exciting time of reflection and renewal, a time of fresh ideas and green shoots. We have already imagined new ways of opening our doors and hearts to the community through music and children's programs. Our church proclaims God's good news of wholeness to all while affirming a caring community for ourselves. We

appreciate that throughout our church's long history people have faithfully extended God's mission to the community and world. We appreciate that God is doing good work now in and through our community. We affirm with gratitude God's grace in our lives."

Tani's words enthuse with blessedness. We are indeed blessed and we are called to be a blessing in our support of the church and its mission.

While the church is a lovely place to be and we are blessed in Christ, we are constantly challenged by the concept of blessing as shown in the Beatitudes we've been discussing.

I've already touched on mourners who are blessed. We heard in the readings that Luke's version of the Beatitudes is shorter than Matthew's version. Jesus spoke them at different times and met different needs. One is particularly instructive for stewardship because it address a social and economic aspect in life.

Luke says, "Blessed are the poor" and Matthew says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." According the Jerome Commentary, "The poor are happy because of God's special care for them. God was conceived of as an Oriental king, and a king's duty was to protect the weak. In the Bible economic destitution is an evil to be corrected (Deuteronomy 15:11), and wealth is not evil in itself; indeed it is necessary for the well-being of the kingdom, but it risks neglect of God and of the poor."

If there is one good reason to keep the church healthy and strong it is to be an advocate for and to care for the poor and hungry and we do so here at Redwoods.

Finally, one might find it strange that the psalmist in our Hebrew Bible reading today blesses God. Surely, it is God who blesses us. What the psalmist is doing is giving a shout out to God for all the amazing things God has done for him:

<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, etc. (From Psalm 103).

We are blessed so we "bless" the Lord. Stewardship Commitment is a shout out to God.

We experience blessings in many ways in and through the church. Blessing is a shout out to God in gratitude for all the things God has done and is doing for our world and us. To be blessed is a challenge and as we meet the challenges, we

become even more blessed. In the final analysis, we can indeed affirm the unusual title of the sermon: "Blessed are the Blessed." Amen.