

Gift: Blest to Be a Blessing! By Rev Denice K. Leslie

Denice K. Leslie
Stewardship 2006: Gift and Task
November 19, 2006
Genesis 12: 1-5
Romans 8: 38 – 39
John 1: 14 – 15

Gift: Blest to Be a Blessing!

(Walk over to the communion table and place hands down flat on granite slab):

Does any one here know where this granite slab was quarried? (Wait for the answer). Yes, it came from the Academy Quarry. In the foothills not far from the site of the mother church of this congregation.

Now lift your feet and put them down again firmly. The earth beneath you is solid. Firm and strong like this granite slab.

This stone is our connection to our past. It is a symbol of the sacred ground on which we stand. It is a reminder of all who have come before us to give us all that we have today. The saints who have marched ahead of us and who we remembered last week. They were blest and they have blessed us. What does it mean to have this gift of sacred space? How are we blest to be a blessing? Today our focus is on the gift of God's blessing. Next week we will focus on what it means to be a blessing.

Sacred space, sacred ground. Bedrock. Granite is massive, heavy substantial...permanent...if this whole, building were to burn this stone would remain.

Much like the steadfast love of God. When all else fails or withers away, God's sustaining love IS the bedrock of our lives! And like this dense, enduring crystalline stone which was forged by the heat of the earth centuries ago, God laid down the bedrock of our faith with our ancestor Abraham.

One starry night God spoke and Abraham looked up; listened, and God said, "Abraham, leave everything you know and go into the unknown and I will be with you."

He was 75 years old. He had a life time of "everything to leave! But he also had faith. He believed and he trusted God. That's what faith is: belief and trust in God. His faith, as firm as this piece of granite, made every place he walked the bedrock of sacred ground because God was there. Because Abraham believed and trusted, God loved Abraham --and with open hearted joy and gratitude, promised him, "I will gift you and all of human kind because of your belief and trust in me. I will bless you and make you a blessing to all the families of the earth."

And so the story of the promise began. Abraham had a son, promised by God. His name was Isaac. And Isaac had a son named Jacob, and Jacob had 12 sons....and so the blessing, the gift of God's love was passed down from one generation to another until it has come down to us! We are the sons and daughters of God's blessing. God's promise. God's steadfast covenant to be our God for all generations.

What was God's promise? That we would be blest. God's desire is to bless. All good things come from God. In Genesis God's blesses the creation and gives it to us for our home: the green fields in their abundance, the rivers and forests and flowers and fruits and all creatures great and small. And the beautiful blue sky above! Then God gives us each other. Our loved ones, our friends, our children and grandchildren. Our parents and our grandparents, aunts, and uncles and cousins and people we call family.

Blessing. The word comes from the old English word *bletsian* which is derived from the word blood—as it was used in consecration.

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, Moses read the commandments to the people, sacrificed a bull and splattered some of its life essence-its blood on the people and against the altar on which the bull was sacrificed. The blood, the life essence belongs to God. Sharing the blood unites God and the people together in a common bond—a covenant relationship where in two parties agree to specific terms. The people promise to be

Gift: Blest to Be a Blessing! By Rev Denice K. Leslie

God's people, and God promises to be their God for all generations!

The promise grew to include more and more people until we became a great nation and forgot about God. We strayed away from God's promises, in spite of many calls back.

Although we did not live up to our part of the bargain, God, being God, did not fail us. Then one day, God decided to slip in among us as one of us and live the blessing in our midst—to be a gift—a presence among us of God's own self.

Because God is a Self-Giving Blessing God. As John's gospel says so well, "The Word became flesh and lived among us.... (and) from his fullness we have received grace upon grace."

God lavishly grants us the blessing of salvation through Jesus.

This is the season of giving thanks. Next Thursday we will sit down at full tables, many of us with friends and loved ones and celebrate Thanksgiving Day.

In preparation, I invite you to take the mum insert, and turn it over to the blank side. We are going to "count our blessings." Not just for the past year, but for the whole of our lives. Find something to write with and then, begin to think about who or what has blest your life.

It may help to close your eyes and allow your memory to roam back over the past. Roll back the years to the stirrings of those earliest memories. Who was there for you? What blessings did you receive? Begin moving forward person by person, event by event.

Who blessed you with their presence or help when you needed it: helped you get your first home maybe with money for a down payment, or a car so necessary for getting to that job—or that first job, or was it tuition or books or money for a trip, or journey into the future of a new life, or a camera, or encouragement and belief in you, or good advice, or someone who had high expectations for you, or a skill they gave you, or your first instrument---a piano or guitar or violin or flute, or remarked on what a

nice voice you have, or gave you your first sewing machine, or tools, or took your fishing—or shared their faith with you?

Perhaps a neighbor, a teacher, a friend, a pastor, a parent, a Sunday School teacher or youth leader, a person in this congregation. Let the forgotten faces who have blessed and gifted your life be remembered.

Now ask yourself. What would your life be like today without these blessing people?? What might have happened if they had not been there for you? (Pause and sit down and do your own.)

When you are ready, fold up your slip of paper, and when the offering is taken this morning, please place your blessing list in the plate as an act of thanksgiving.

People, God desires to bless *just because*. God would rather bless than anything else! "God has a compulsion to bless which proved strong enough to bring God's bodily entrance into history."¹

(Move to baptismal and signal volunteers to come and stand by the font with you.) This is what baptism is all about, bottom line: The gift of God's love freely and abundantly poured out for you *(pour water into bowls—give one to each volunteer.)*

God's love pouring over your life to refresh and bless. God's hospitality reaching out for you and embracing you because you are God's. God's beloved, born to be blest, born to love and bless others as God blesses you.

Baptism is a physical reminder of that love which surrounds us from our birth and desires to bless us all our lives.

Have you ever tried to pry open an abalone? Have you ever tried to take the bark off a tree? Have you ever tried to get the lug nuts off a flat tire? Or the fishy smell out of a fish? Have you ever tried to get all the water out of a sponge? Its like these things are inseparable—I mean you can't hardly pick up a sponge and not expect dampness. This is how God's love is.

¹ Alive Now, Nov.Dec. 2006, Blessings, p0. 8

Gift: Blest to Be a Blessing! By Rev Denice K. Leslie

Speaking from personal experience, Paul tells us, "I am convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God." Have you ever asked yourself what your life would be like without God in it?

Without your faith in Jesus Christ? Without the church? Without opportunities to not only be blest but as Jesus' disciple to be a blessing? If the world seems to be in an awful mess, imagine it without believers.

(Motion to volunteers) As it comes to you, take the bowl, dip your finger in it and turn to your neighbor and make the sign of the cross on his or her forehead with these words, "Nothing can separate you from God's love! You are blest to be a blessing."