

*Lord, illumine our hearts, illumine our minds, illumine our spirits,
That we may be like lanterns, shining your light into this world. Amen.*

This week we see Jesus beginning the training of his new recruits.
He takes them up a hill away from the gathering crowds,
and begins to teach them.

But he's not teaching them work skills, or customer service, or management
practices. He is teaching them how they are to be as his followers.

The Be-Attitudes. And he doesn't even say, "Be like this," just –

This is how it's going to be, and it's going to be blessed.

These "blessed are you's," are addressed to disciples,
to people who have chosen to follow Jesus.

Jesus telling these people what they've signed on for if they're going to continue
to follow him. "This is what it's going to be like for you," he says.

"You will often feel down, poor in spirit – and you're blessed.

*"You will often mourn what you've left behind, your losses now –
and you're blessed.*

"You will be asked to be meek, put others ahead of yourself – and you're blessed.

"When you hunger and thirst for righteousness, holiness, you are blessed.

"When you are merciful as God is merciful to you, you are blessed.

*"When you are the pure in heart, completely focused on your relationship with me,
you are blessed.*

"When you serve as a peacemaker in this divided and broken world, you are blessed.

*"And when you are persecuted for my sake, for living my values in this world,
And you will be, even there you are blessed."*

Blessed. Each of these things Jesus lists as things his follower are or will do,
he prefaces by saying "Blessed."

What does it mean to be blessed? One definition is consecrated, holy, set apart.

We who gather in the name of Jesus are that – consecrated at our baptisms,
made holy by the Holy Spirit in us, set apart to be part of God's mission
to reclaim, restore and renew all of creation to wholeness in Christ.

We also use the word "blessed" to convey a sense of good fortune,
being favored by God. That's how the hashtag #blessed gets used.

But blessing is not only something we receive – it is something we pass along.

Our pledge campaign this fall is “Blessed to Bring Blessing.”

This isn’t “now share your gifts with the other children,” kind of message.

I remember getting a new bike for my 6th birthday and just wanting to ride it – and being told I had to let the other kids at the party have a turn.

I did so reluctantly, telling them they could each go once around the yard.

When one boy refused to get off after his circuit, I pushed him off it!

No, God doesn’t insist that we share our blessings; I think God is perfectly happy if we only receive God’s blessings – we could all get better at receiving.

But when we are truly blessed and aware of how blessed we are, it is natural to want to pass that along, so that we become part of God’s great enterprise of blessing.

A few weeks ago, one of our new members at Wayside, whose work schedule unfortunately precludes him being there in person most Sundays, emailed me with great excitement and many exclamation points:

Pastor Kate, God does grant miracles!!!! I have been praying to God for a miracle to happen in my life this week and praise God it just happened!!!! Please share with everyone that prayer does work, God does hear us and he will grant miracles!!!!!! Never give up hope!! I am so grateful to God and that he has an unlimited capacity for forgiveness! I pray that all those in our congregation will have their prayers for miracles granted we well!!!

I believe many of you have had such moments.

Let’s take a few minutes now to tell each other some short stories of blessing.

When we hear stories of blessing, it opens us up to more.

Turn to someone near you, or walk over to someone you’ve always wanted to get to know, and share either a story of being blessed, or blessing someone else.

Just about two minutes, and then the other shares a story.

Try to make it two or three people at the most, so everyone has time to hear stories. We’ll take five minutes total.

[Those of you on Zoom will be invited into breakout rooms – please say yes!]

How was that? Did we hear some great stories?

We are children of God – and children love stories. We never outgrow that.

We need to hear each other’s stories in order to grow our faith.

We need to hear each other’s stories in order to grow our relationships with each other and become the community of blessing God wants us to be.

We need to hear each other’s stories in order to become Christ to this world.

It is only as we open ourselves to Jesus, to each other, to the world
that we will make a world-changing difference.

I can say, “Enter a relationship with Jesus” till I’m blue in the face – we need
to be willing to take the steps out of comfort, out of convenience, to start.

Read the gospels again; who is the Jesus you find there?

Deepen your prayer life, inviting Jesus to speak to you in quiet. What does he say?
Join Jesus in mission, not from home but out where hurting people are.

Many years ago, long before I was ordained, I made one choice and then another
to walk more deeply with Jesus.

I started going to church on Wednesday nights, not just Sundays.

I joined a prayer group in which I could be real and be loved.

I went to bible study and on retreats, and got involved in outreach ministries.

You all know how much I still operate out of my own stuff and not God’s heart,
but I know the difference, and I seek always to come back to Jesus’ love.

This invitation is to walk in the Way of Love, Jesus’ love.

Jesus’ Love is not convenient. Jesus’ love is costly as the beatitudes remind us.

This kind of love can transform the world.

It can move governments – it took a long, long time to abolish slavery,
but it was Christians in England who kept at it, in unity of purpose.

Now we are reckoning with how much damage racism has done even since that
one form of evil was declared illegal – it was never truly abolished.

Repairing harm is costly. Turning hearts around is costly. Jesus’ love is costly.

This kind of love can transform human hearts – people with no hope for a future,
when they are invited into community with us, find themselves transformed.

As we actively walk in the Way of Love, deepening our relationship with Jesus,
with each other, with the world, we start to look like beloved children

God already sees us as.

We are blessed to bring blessing.

Amen.

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I John 3:1-3

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.