

# Blessing

October 29, 2023

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled "Blessing." Thank you to Rhonda, Temi, and Glynnis for being part of the video. The scripture reading is Mark 10 13 to 16. Happy birthday this week to Heather.

## Welcome, Prayer, Announcements

Good morning everybody. Happy to welcome you here this morning. We're celebrating Connie and John this week. They're celebrating an anniversary so we wish them wish them the best on that. And then in a couple of weeks we're going to celebrate Martin's daughter Ashley. So, we're going to we're gonna have a baby shower and, and please speak to Janet if you'd like more information on that. That'll be on November 4th. So that's coming up. We were praying last week and we continue to pray for Helene's family. They were scheduled to come. They were scheduled to leave on Wednesday. We haven't heard anything yet. So, we are going to—as far as I know anyways we haven't heard anything—and so we're gonna keep praying for them and for their, their safe—their safe passage and, and their reuniting together. And then update on Jack and Marie. Jack is home from the hospital. He was in. He's back out again. He has a lot going on. He has many medications and, and a lot of health concerns. So please continue to pray for him. And Marie is, is on the mend; doing better but still, still, still ailing quite a bit. And so, we would like to continue to pray for them. I'd like to ask you to stand as we begin with a prayer and then we'll sing a few songs together.

Lord, we are blessed to be here in your presence. It is good to get together with other believers to raise our voices in song; to turn our minds to you; to encourage one another, just even by our presence, God. Thank you for this great way you have made for us in your son who brings us together. We want to lift up those we know who are sick; whether they are physically ill; whether they are suffering from mental illness; whether they are suffering from illness of spirit, God. We ask for your healing hand. You are the Great Physician. You know what they need. And you know how we can help, God. Show us the ways that we can help them. Thank you for the great unity of believers who gather together in your name. Thank you that you are here in our midst. Thank you that we can know that you are present by the love and joy and peace and all the other gifts that your Holy Spirit gives us. Help us to use those into our community. Help us to be a bright light. It's in Jesus name that we pray. Amen.

## Communion

Good morning. I'd like to start by reading a scripture to you but before I do I want to give you some background. I'm going to be reading from Exodus and in Exodus, the children of Israel were in Egypt and they were slaves there, and God decided that it was time to free his people. And so he sent plagues to the people of Egypt so that they would let the Israelites go. And the last plague was he killed all of the firstborn of the Egyptian children. And the way that they would know that the is where the Israelites were and not to kill the Israelite the firstborn of the Israelite children was to have some blood of a lamb on the door. Okay, so this is God telling Moses this.

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in Egypt and he gave these instructions. He said on the tenth day of the month, each man must choose either a lamb or young goat for his household. If his family is too

small to eat a whole animal, he and his next-door neighbor may share an animal in proportion to the number of people and the amount that each person can eat. You may choose either a sheep or a goat, but it must be one-year-old male without any defect. Then on the evening of the 14th day of the month the whole community of Israel is to kill the animal. The people are to take some of the blood and put it on the doorpost and above the doors of the houses in which the animals are to be eaten. That night the meat is to be roasted and eaten with bitter herbs and with bread made without yeast. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled but eat it roasted whole including the head and legs and the internal organs. You must not leave any of it until morning. If any is left over, it must be burned. You are to eat it quickly for you are to be dressed for travel with your sandals on your feet and your walking stick in your hand. It is the Passover festival in honor of me, the LORD. And that Passover festival is still celebrated by Jews today, and it was celebrated at the at the time. Even when Jesus—even when Jesus was alive.

And so Jesus and his disciples they went up into an upper room and they ate that Passover festival and it says while they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat it." He said, "This is my body." Then he took a cup and he gave thanks to God and gave it to them. "Drink it, all of you," he said, "This is my blood which seals God's covenant. My blood poured out for the many for all for forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in my father's kingdom." Then they sang or hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. There's no—this same story is repeated. In, it's in Matthew; it's in Mark; it's in Luke, and they talk about the bread. They talk about the wine. But there's no mention of the lamb and there was always a lamb at the Passover. So then the question becomes 'where's the lamb?' And I think that question's answered in Isaiah 53 where Isaiah is talking about Jesus coming.

He talks about it in the past tense but it's, it's a—it's a future tense statement. Okay it says, "It was the will of the Lord that his servant grow like a plant taking root in dry ground. He had no dignity or beauty to make us take notice of him, there was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him (which is kind of in contradiction to any of the movies that we watch about Jesus, because he comes across as being quite handsome). We despised him and rejected him. He endured suffering and pain. No one would even look at him. We ignored him as if he were nothing but he endured suffering that should have been ours. The pain that we should have borne. All the while we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God but because of our sins he was wounded. Beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered. Made whole by the blows he received. All of us were- were like sheep that were lost; each of us going his own way. But the Lord made the punishment fall on him. The punishment all of us deserved. He was treated harshly but endured it humbly. He never said a word. Like a lamb about to be slaughtered, like a sheep about to be sheared, he never said a word. He was arrested and sentenced and led off to die and no one cared about his fate. He was put to death for the sins of our people. He was placed in a grave with those who are evil. He was buried with the rich even though he had never committed a crime or told a lie.

So when you flip back to Matthew and why wasn't there a lamb at the Lord's supper? At that Passover meal? And the reason there wasn't a lamb is, Jesus was the lamb that year. Jesus was the lamb. He was the—he was the one who was going to die for the people. He was the lamb. Which brings us to the point of, we do not—our salvation doesn't depend on our commitment to God. It depends on God's commitment to us. He was the lamb. We're not the lamb. He was the lamb. He's the object of our faith and that's what says it's not the quality of our faith. Not the quality of our deeds, but the object of our

faith. And his, his commitment to us is what we need. Our commitment to him is not what he needs. His commitment to us. And so we eat the bread and we drink the blood and we eat it here as a family because we are a family. We're a family of people who are united in believing, just like families met back in the Old Testament as a family to, they met to celebrate the Passover. We're meeting to celebrate a much greater Passover. We're meeting to celebrate our hope in eternity with God and, and we're, we're a family gathered together to eat for that purpose. Let us pray.

Thank you, God, so much for sending Christ to the earth to be the sacrificial lamb. And thank you for, for what he did for us. And we pray that we will do, do good and do what we do because he did what he did to love us. And we, we want to do what we do to show our love for him and to love others. And thank you so much that we don't depend on that, because we're not always good at it. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Scripture Reading

### Mark 10:13-16 (FNV)

The people who were bringing a little... Mark 10 verses 13 to 16: The people were bringing their little children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and bless them. For his followers spoke harsh words to the ones bringing them. When Jesus saw what his followers were doing, it made him angry. So he said to them, "Let the little children come to me. Do not turn them away. Creator's Good Road belongs to the ones who are like these children. I speak from my heart. The only way onto Creator's Good Road is to become as trusting as a little child." Then he took the children into his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them.

Thank you.

## Sermon

### Blessing

Good morning. Good morning. It's so good to see everybody today and to be here with you.

Today's message is about blessings. And I have to say, I've always thought of blessings kind of like the song that we sang Count Your Many Blessings. One by one and think about all the things that God does for us and I love that and it's so amazing to be focused on the blessings that we receive and feel that gratitude. It does so many amazing things for our hearts. And recently with some recent events in my life, I've really been reminded of how immense the blessing of faith is.

So, I want to share with you something that I'm working on in my life. It comes from a book called The Blessing by Gary Smalley and John Trent and it was published in 1986. "Why are you reading a book that was written like a zillion years ago?" That was actually the year that my daughter was born, and I really wish that I'd known about it then. It was actually given to me by my sister-in-law, knowing some of the things that I was going through and she felt like it was something that I would benefit from, and I certainly have. In the book, a blessing is something that is life changing and according to Smalley and Trent, it involves five elements and I'm hoping, were we able to get that up? So a family blessing means, is part of meaningful touch, a spoken message, attaching high value to the one being blessed,

picturing a special future for the one being blessed and an active commitment to fulfill the blessing<sup>1</sup>. I'm not going to give you a recap of the book. We'd be here for quite some time but I am going to talk about the first two because they are very meaningful to me.

The reading that we had, which was done so wonderfully, thank you, was actually from an Indigenous translation of the Bible and in this passage, or in the book, they call God Creator. That's the name that they give him, and I didn't actually write out what Jesus is called and I put Jesus in because it makes more sense to us. And it says, "The people were bringing their little children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and bless them. But his followers spoke harsh words to the ones bringing them. When Jesus saw what his followers were doing, it made him angry. So he said to them, "Let the little children come to me. Do not turn them away. Creator's Good Road belongs to the ones who are like these children. I speak from my heart. The only way onto Creator's Good Road is to become as trusting as a little child." Then he took the children into his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them."

When we think back to the bazillion different ways that Jesus blessed people, I think it's very significant that when he healed the lepers, he didn't shout a blessing from across the room. And remember, you had to call out in those days if you had leprosy, you had to call out that you had leprosy so everybody could stay very far away from you. So, it would have been quite reasonable for Jesus to call out, "Hey, I got the blessing. Here you're healed." But rather he did something that, honestly, every time I think about it, it gives me goosebumps. The first thing he did was he went and he touched them. And then he blessed them. There's a whole lot more modern research than, you know, what, 20, 24 years ago, almost 24 years ago, into the hug and what the hug does for us. And when the book was written in 1986, they told us that, you know, 10 seconds of a hug will give us blessings. But now we know that it actually lowers stress and delivers endorphins to us and lowers our heart rate as well. 20 seconds is the optimum, which if you've ever hugged somebody for 20 seconds, is a long hug. One of the favorite things that I have when I come to church is getting greeted at the door by Ed. Ed always hugs me. I love hugging Ed. It's just one of those things. But the thing that really means so much to me is when he knows that I'm going through something difficult in my life, I get a longer hug at the door. And that's so good. Makes such a difference to me.

My mom died on September 7th of this year. I don't really ever remember my mom hugging me, although I am confident that she did when I was a child. I had a very complicated relationship with my mom. She had had a catastrophic fall. She broke her pelvis, her neck, and had a huge gash on her leg open up. And we knew there was no way back. She knew it too, and she made the decision that she wasn't going to eat, drink, or take any medications. She was old, and she was tired of the dwindling quality of her life. The problem was that she didn't realize that she needed pain medication. And in her delirium, she thought that I was betraying her by allowing them to give her medication. She was angry. When I say betraying me, she told me, "You've betrayed me." She was delirious. I don't hold her response. Believe me, over and over in my mind, it was, "Forgive her, Father." She does not know what she's doing. Those were very, very hard days. Very hard days. After she died, and even during when she

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<sup>1</sup> Smalley, Gary and John (PhD) Trent. *The Blessing*. New York, NY: Touchstone, 1986.

was dying, I was so blessed with long, long hugs from my friends. And I cannot tell you what they meant to me. I hugged them right back. I needed those hugs to soothe my heart.

Then there's the tongue. Proverbs 8, 21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." How quick are we to criticize, instead of looking for specific things to offer as an encouraging comment to our friends, our spouse, our children, our grandchildren, our parents? I know I can. In Proverbs 3, 27 and 28, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say, "Go and come back," and tomorrow I will give it," when you have it with you." I remember reading this and thinking, "That's a little strange. It's like, "I'll give you money tomorrow." You know what? I think it goes way deeper than that. When you think about the blessing of a good word or an encouragement to someone, to speak a blessing to someone, don't put it off.

One of the saddest songs of the 1970s, and I realize that's like, those are the oldies. See I remember when the 50s were the oldies, but yeah, those are like the *really* oldies. One of the saddest songs of the 1970s was a song by Harry Chapin called "Cats in the Cradle." It's about a dad who is so busy with his life that he can never quite find time to be with his son. When he grows old, his son had learned the lesson his dad taught him. And now the son, in turn, doesn't have time for his now elderly dad. And the dad is left as lonely as his son was. This is not the way God wants us to live. So often we just don't speak those words of love and encouragement to those we love. And we really don't speak them when we're irritated with them, right? We really, really don't. But consider this. When was the last time you changed something in your character or in your behavior because someone ignored you? Or because you felt left out? Or because you felt alone? Never. Grandparents, parents, disciples of Jesus, are we unwilling to reach out and hug our children and speak of love because it might feel uncomfortable or awkward or embarrass us or embarrass them or take too long or have to do it every day, God forbid, or whatever, whatever it is, that we're so willing to take the chance in not giving it that it won't make any difference to them?

Let me share a bit from my own life. Did I get words of blessing? Not very often. I got some praise when I got good grades. I also got, "Imagine how good these grades would be if you actually tried." Sound familiar? I don't remember my mom ever communicating much affection to me. She was angry. She was always angry. And she tried to drink her way out of a lot of that anger. She gave me money to buy my own clothes and personal grooming items from the time I was, I don't know, 11, 12. So there were never any fun shopping trips together. Then she went back to university. She was always reading or writing papers. She was way too busy for me and my sister. I was starved of blessings from my mom. I began to look for love in other places. Yep, all the wrong places. I had relationships and was very reluctant to let any relationship go when it wasn't good for me because I was afraid to lose the next best thing to love. I had no one to give me a blessing. And so, I fell from one bad relationship into the next until God reached out and began the process of my salvation from those destructive forces. And I want you to understand this and I want this to sink in. I was 12 when I began to be immoral. 12. Not having these blessings of meaningful touch and spoken messages of love and belief in me made it so easy to look for love in all the wrong places. And this cycle didn't happen uniquely to me.

Out of my best friend circle, all of whom have gone to church for decades and are still committed Christians, we have 11 children between us. Eight have some kind of faith. And out of those eight, only two are followers of Christ. The remaining nine have looked for love in all the wrong places. So many places. We've all come to understand the four of my closest friends. We've come to understand that we

chose to follow the culture of our church. So, thinking back to, you know, you don't want to do too much and you want to be involved and you want to do and rather than working to lavishly pour out our love to our children.

Totally lost my place. Being part of a great church isn't enough. Our grandchildren and our children need our efforts to touch them in meaningful ways. An arm around a shoulder, a squeeze of the hand during grace, a pat on the back, a quick hug, a long hug. And our children need us to give specific words of encouragement and love. Specific words of encouragement. Not just I love you. Specific. This is what I love about you. Not just once or twice a year. Not just once or twice a month. Not just once or twice a week. These words need to wash blessing over them every day so that they feel secure and minimize the likelihood that they will look for love in all the wrong places. I wasn't blessed much because of the culture of my family and I was very much taken aback when I read this particular quotation in the blessing. If you find yourself saying, "I was blessed enough," you likely weren't and that is a defensive posture. It's what I had said for decades. I was blessed enough. The last 37 years I've been a disciple of Christ. But I missed out on those blessings and I see now that it hurt me and set up all kinds of patterns in my life that are not pleasing to God. And that brings me, that also means I'm not very good at giving those blessings. If I haven't been blessed much, I'm not good at giving them. It's not second nature to me. I have to work at it. When I'm committing before you, I'm going to work harder at giving blessings because I recognize I'm not really all that good at it. With your children, your spouse, your close friends, even your parents, it's later than you think.

And that brings me to blessing your parents. I struggled to bless my mom. She hurt me. Her absence hurt my heart as a girl and as a woman. I struggled to honor her with my blessing. The author of Ephesians reminds us why we need to honor our parents in chapter 6, verses 2 and 3. It says, "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with a promise. And this is the promise, "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy a long life on the earth." But I will tell you that God blessed me with a happier heart. Once I found a way to bless her with my time, she even told me that it would make her happier. So, I always struggled to go and see my mom. She was very negative and she talked about all of her troubles all of the time. And it was always just kind of soul-deadening. It was hard to go and see her. And I'll be honest with you, I avoided it kind of for as long as I could. And then I'd go and see her. One day she picked up the phone and called me. She said, "I've decided. You need to call me every day." And I'm like, "Is there no end?" "You need to call me every day. What time can you do that?" And in my sort of "rrrr" I said, "I can call you at 9.30 in the morning." "Okay, that would be great. That will make me happy." I doubted it. Truly, I doubted it. But I set my alarm to call her every morning at 9.30. And you know what? It changed our relationship. It's not that she didn't grumble and complain when we got together, but she was feeling the blessing of my time. And as I look back, sort of in light of what I'm learning through this book, that blessing of my time and my caring, and every day I told her I loved her. And every day she told me she loved me. That was probably the most blessing that I ever had in all of our time together.

So, I'm not suggesting that you set your alarm and call your mother every day. That's not what I'm suggesting, or your father. But I am saying, have you talked to them lately? Have you blessed them with your time for focused conversation, for something meaningful? Have you thought of something specific that they did for you or that has encouraged you about the way that you were brought up and that you're grateful for? Tell them. It's so encouraging to them. It's blessing them. Have you told them that you love them? Then he took the children into his arms, laid his hand on them, and blessed them. Let's

all, and I certainly ask for your prayers to help me, let's all make a decision to get better at and more diligently apply ourselves to pouring out our blessing on the people God has placed in our lives to be our family, even as he has poured out his blessing in our lives. Let's pray.

Dearest Lord, God help us to be people of blessing others. God help us when our hearts are stubborn. Help us when they're lazy. Help us when we just don't want to. God, we need your help to be more like Jesus, and it's in his name we pray. Amen.

## Closing Prayer

Lord, we thank you for the great blessing of togetherness this morning. We thank you for the people who have brought us thoughts today for those thoughts, for the time that they put in to preparing what they wanted to say. Thank you God for being here in our midst. Lord, we ask that you would heal those who we know of who are sick. We think of Jack, we think of Marie and Dianne. I'm sure there are many, many more who we haven't maybe mentioned, but who are ailing. Lord we ask that you show us how to bless them with our love and through us that you would bless them with your love. Lord we pray for peace in this world, which seems wildly unlikely and so we know that it would be a miracle from you. We ask for patience with one another, with people we interact with. We ask for patience between people we don't even know, for understanding for a common ground, a common love, God, that can only come from you. As we take your word into our lives and into our week, we ask for strength, for courage, and that we would be focused on what we can do for someone else. Because we have such a great example in Jesus and what he did for us. We thank you for him, for his life, for his death, for his resurrection, and for our hope in him. It's in his name we gather and it's in his name we pray. Amen. Have a good week, everybody.

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