

BEARING BLESSING



Scripture:

Numbers 6:22-26

²²The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²³Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, ²⁴The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; ²⁶the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

John 1:43-51

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



Our guest preacher was the Reverend Dr. John Philip Newell, a poet, peacemaker, and scholar. Formerly Warden of Iona Abbey in the Western Isles of Scotland, he is now Companion Theologian for the American Spirituality Center of Casa del Sol at Ghost Ranch in the high desert of New Mexico where he and his wife spend their summers. John Philip, the co-founder of Heartbeat: A Journey Towards Earth's Wellbeing, is an ordained Church of Scotland minister with a passion for peace among the great wisdom traditions of humanity. His PhD is from the University of Edinburgh and he is internationally acclaimed for his work in the field of Celtic

spirituality, having authored over fifteen books, including Listening for the Heartbeat of God, Praying with the Earth, and his most recent visionary work The Rebirthing of God: Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings. John Philip divides his time between Edinburgh with his family where he does most of his writing and the United States of America where he teaches and preaches across the nation.

BEARING BLESSING

In the name of the One from whom all life is born. Amen

May I say how very good it is to be among you. Thank you for the gracious welcome. And how kind of you to lay on some weather for me today to make me feel so much at home. I don't know what I would have done with sunshine!

OUR PRESENCE

It is a good thing, isn't it, to prepare for times of gathering or for times of encountering one another or for times of making our offering. It is a good thing to prepare for a sermon or a talk or a presentation. But much more important for many of the contents we may bring or expertise or perspective we may bring to a gathering or an encounter, much more important is bringing our presence to one another, to allow our heart to come into true relationship with the heart of the other, and in so doing to release something of the sacredness and the beauty and the creativity and the wisdom that is deep within the other.

MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS

Many years ago, I had a conversation with a Jewish man from New Jersey. New "Joisy," I should say. We were sharing most important moments in our lives. He shared with me a most important moment from his life, from his boyhood.

He had grown up in a Hassidic community in New York City. It was his practice every summer to go to a camp for Jewish boys. On the day he was remembering for me, word got around the camp that the Reb, the much loved Rabbi of their community was at the camp and he wanted to see the boys. So the boys rushed down to the riverside to where they learned the Reb was, and they found the Rabbi standing in the river, rocking. That mantric movement that the Jewish mystics sometimes refer to as "one pointed concentration," looking to the heart of the moment because that is where God is. God is at the heart of this moment, at the heart of every moment, at the heart of every encounter. And we're being invited to be present to both the beauty and the pain that is within one another and present to the sacredness that is within the earth, made of God.

Do we know just how essential we are in this work of presence? It holds tremendous energy for the holy work of transformation, healing in our world between us as individuals and as communities, between us as nations, and between us as great religious traditions and between us and the earth's other species.

The boys joined the Rabbi in the river, and he said just one thing to them. He said, "The water that we see flowing past us now

will never flow past us again.” And then he returned into his rocking movement of prayer. All the boys began to rock in prayer in the river. It is a beautiful picture, isn't it?

But the combination of the flowing water and the rocking movement put the boy to sleep. When he woke up, all the other boys were away, but the Rabbi was holding him, continuing to rock. This time, the Rabbi didn't say anything. He just looked into the boy's face and smiled, and the boy, now a man, remembers that as a moment when he glimpsed the countenance of the One from whom we and all things come.

**Do we know that we are bearers of that countenance made in the image and likeness of God?
Do we know just how much energy for healing, for true relationship we carry within us?
And do we know just how essential it is that each of us take up our role, because there are blessings in the most hidden moments of life, the quietest encounters, the humblest of situations in which no one else but us, but you, can carry that blessing in your words, in your actions, in your countenance.**

WE ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

What is it to be made of God, to be made in the image and likeness of God? Part of it is to be bearers of blessing. Yes, there are some emphatic “NOs” that we need to speak and live in our lives, strong “NOs” to the falseness of what our nation is sometimes part of, to the limitations of what our religious household is sometimes part of, NO to injustices and violence within our

communities, within our world. But long before we say “NO,” I believe we are being invited at a deep level, and repeatedly, to say, “Yes” to the true heart of the other, made of God. And in saying, “Yes,” offering blessing to release what is truly there.

Our first reading, called *The Priestly Blessing*, “The Lord bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you,” that one. That is the oldest known text from our Hebrew scriptures. In 1979, it was found by archeologists in the Middle East. They found it etched in a silver amulet and it was dated 600 BCE. So we know that that blessing has been used for at least twenty-five-hundred years.

MY FATHER LOVED THE PRIESTLY BLESSING

That was the blessing that was particularly etched into my father's heart. He had always loved offering this priestly blessing. In his last year, when dementia was rapaciously taking his mind and memory from us, he didn't forget that prayer. He began to want to give it to everyone all the time, again and again and again.

One of the last times I visited him before he went into the nursing home where he ended his days, when I was preparing to arrive in Canada where he was living, my sister, who was nearby, contacted me and said that she wanted me to sell the family car while I was home. She felt this was a male job. My father was still trying to drive it, totally illegally. So I phoned up the car salesman the day before, and explained that I was coming in with my father the next day. I said, “Now he may seem very confused about all sorts of things, but please honor him by speaking to him, not to me. This is his car; I'll be there with him.”

The car salesman totally got the point, and there was playful banter and repartee. My father never lost his sense of humor. There were absurd moments in the conversation, of course. My father would say things like, "Now how much money do I owe you for this car." The salesman said, "No, no, Dr. Newell, we want to give you money for this car." My father looked at me and said, "This is very generous of them."

I think most business transactions need a bit of dementia around them to improve them.

But at the end of the transaction, when the check was handed over to my father, I said to the salesman, "Now, whenever I leave my father's presence or whenever I end a telephone call, he blesses me, and I think he would like to bless you now.

So there we were, standing in the middle of a car salesroom, in the scum of the economic world, the tax collector of today. My father takes his hand, looks into his face, and gives him the full blessing. The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

**I stood looking at my father,
thinking "if only."
If only I could be such
a bearer of blessing.
And I looked at the car salesman
who had tears streaming
down his face.
He will never forget that moment.
Never!**

Do we know that we are bearers of such blessing? Do we know that that is part of our holy calling:

- to bless one another in the most intimate relationships of our lives,
- to bless those, not always with words, sometimes just with our presence, with our actions, in all the encounters of our lives,
- to bring blessing to the true heart of other nations and to the earth?

In doing that holy work, do we know that we are part of the great work of transformation? Do we wish to be part of this work of change?

Do you know how essential you are in this holy work, each one of you, made of God?

Glory be to God and to Christ and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forever. Amen



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