

***Original Blessing: The beginning of Hope***

Today is a celebration. A celebration of God, of call, of commissioning, of ordination. This is a celebration of the believers, the church, gathered together praising God and having the goodwill of all people in their hearts.

And, while we are here to celebrate, this gathering also serves as a call to remembrance. We're called to remember where we came from, where we're going, and to whom we belong. We are invited to remember our baptisms, our call. We are invited and challenged to remember God's original blessing and – not just remember – but to proclaim it and be witnesses to it. To re-commit ourselves to be one in Christ as we are once again invited and sent into the world so that all people might hear and receive the Good News of Christ.

God's original blessing. That's how all this began. The real message of Genesis is that God made the plants, the trees, the vegetation, and then God said, "This is good." God made light, a greater light to rule the day, a lesser one to rule the night, and God made the stars. God saw it all and said, "It is good." Then God filled the sea with fish and the sky with birds, and even great sea monsters in the sea, and again, God said, "It is good." God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind" – Cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind, and once again God proclaimed, "It is good." Then God made something else, slowly. God made a creature who could write poetry, paint masterpieces for eye and ear, care for people and all the earth's creatures – care for them with medicine as well as with faith. God made humankind in God's own image, and God says for the first time - that this is not just good – but very good. That's how all this began – with God's original blessing, a blessing that is yours and mine today! A blessing that has never ended! A blessing that is deeper than any human accomplishment, deep as creation, and as old as the universe. You and I are witnesses to this blessing. You and I are called to proclaim this blessing in all we do today and all days so that we might be God's Christ led messengers of hope and life to the world.

The struggle today is, most Christian Churches and theology do not start with Genesis 1 and 2 and God's original blessing, but with Genesis 3 - the Fall, or original sin. Now sin is real. All you have to do is look around and you can't miss the reality of sin—violence, wars and crime, abuse and greed, racism and sexism still run rampant, poverty and injustice are everywhere. But to place all the emphasis on sin and what is wrong with the world becomes oppressive and ultimately a self-fulfilling prophecy. Now hear this leaders of the church, we are what we eat – physically and spiritually. We become what we take in. We become what we allow to swirl and dwell inside of us. What are you taking in? What have you truly come to believe? Well if you are not sure - What words are coming out of your mouth? Where do your words reveal that you spend your time existing? In the realm of God's original blessing – the blessing that brings hope – the blessing that enables both us and other persons to come face to face with Christ? Or, are you so focused on sin, on what is wrong, on what you perceive as not good, that you are slowly allowing life to be sucked out of you? Are you so focused on what is wrong that you are sucking the life out of your community, your congregation? - **rather than re-presenting the blessing of love, forgiveness, and life that God's sent God's Son to make known and restore?** Sure, we all fall short, but the image of God exists and persists in everyone I've ever met. "Original blessing," writes Matthew Fox, "is prior to any sin, original or less than original." Sin and the Fall are real, but nevertheless it is blessing that God has bestowed on us and this world since the creation. (Blessing is God's original intention – and that intention has never changed.)

Yes, Sin and suffering take their toll. But never forget, God created the world in abundance and goodness. God creates each of us in the abundance of blessing which is in God's own image.

This Old Testament blessing leads to the New Testament witness. Jesus repeats God's blessing by proclaiming in Matthew 5, "Blessed are you, blessed are you, you indeed are very blessed.

It has always been important to me that affirmation and blessing come first in the gospel and at the beginning of the entire biblical text. In the beginning of Genesis

and the Gospels we hear the emphasis of love and blessing. This proclamation is foundational to hope and action. At the baptism of Jesus, a voice from heaven, God's voice, comes to Jesus saying, "This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." God said this to him before Jesus had ever preached a sermon, before he had healed anyone, long before the suffering of the cross, before Jesus had had a chance to prove himself at all. Jesus did not have to earn God's love; he was the Beloved, from the very start. And Jesus is not God's only beloved. God spoke those words God spoke to Jesus again today. As each of you were baptised, God said, "You are my beloved, with you I am well please. As we remembered our baptisms, God spoke today to each of us in the same words spoken to Christ, "You are my beloved, with You I am well pleased." Original blessing, it is the foundation to a transformed, restored life. It is the avenue through which we are made one in Christ.

Let's think about Matthew 5 again in relation to what God says to Jesus and to us at our baptisms. Jesus, in his sermon on the mount, pronounces his blessings **before** people have had a chance to respond to his call, **before** they'd left anything to follow him, **before** they had been found worthy or unworthy. The blessings come in his very first sermon, right up front: blessed are you, blessed are you, you indeed are very blessed. Jesus, in fact, carry's on, continues, God's original blessing - in person, word, and action – a proclamation and witness that is important to hear.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who grieve, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the peacemakers—which means there must be conflict and strife. (Those who put others needs before their own are blessed.)
- And blessed even are those who are persecuted, for theirs too is the kingdom of heaven. (Now -these were a people under occupation – in a sense Jesus says don't allow the occupation to occupy you! Don't allow it to dwell within you and consume you. Instead, dwell, live out of, consume and be consumed by the blessing of God. – We too are under occupation ....)

In other words, blessing can live alongside suffering and trouble. In fact, blessing can bring us out of suffering and trouble. **What hope** this can give to a hurting

world. Blessing does not mean that nothing bad happens. Blessing means that the presence and goodness of God will be with you when you need it most. God does not abandon us in challenges or suffering; God's original blessing is far stronger than what the world can throw at us and stronger than our unwise, unfaithful, or even rebellious decisions that lead us down the wrong paths. Original blessing, which resides in each of us – no matter how deeply we have allowed it to be buried, is the beginning of hope.

When we live guided by the original blessing – this hope in a hopeless world, we can experience again the Pentecost story from Acts – and we can become ignited by the Holy Spirit in ways that we become and lead others to the Holy way of faith and faithful living. When we can live out of this blessing then I truly believe the Lord will add daily to the number of those who believe. This adding daily- this is not simply a historical Pentecost event, it can be, a very present event that paves the way for God's continued transforming, Kingdom building business now and in the future. What Peter and the other disciples do, as we hear in this story, is proclaim and kindle the presence of God's blessing and the fulfillment of God's promises in the power of the resurrected Christ. Hearing this, calling people to remember the presence (spark) of God's blessing and the fulfillment of God's promises, the people in the crowded streets of Jerusalem begin to ignite with hope. They begin to experience confidence and assurance, which comes to each of them personally. They begin to be transformed. They begin to blaze. Christ is now Lord and Master. They recognized their oneness in Christ. The hope of a new beginning is planted in the soul of each person who hears the disciples proclaiming the blessing. Church leaders, Provisionals, Ordinands, preachers, lay persons, hear this: To claim and proclaim God's original blessing brings hope ... and with hope comes life!

So, what do you have to do to be blessed by God? Nothing. It's the way you were created, it's what Jesus claimed and declared before you proved yourself, or didn't. Blessed are you.

Today, this day – know that God has blessed you. Receive, accept that blessing! Don't ignore it or waste it. Enjoy it! You are a child of God. . . made in God's

imagine, existing in God's original blessing! You were born to make manifest, kindle, to make known, to spark, to witness to the glory of God that is within each person whom God created. This original blessing, it is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. Therein lies hope!

In knowing about, believing in, and accepting this blessing there is the power of transformation which ignites new life. This world is not our project, it is our God given opportunity! So - let God's blessing shine! When we do so, we give others permission to do the same. We will ignite people as the body of Christ. And, God will daily add to our number not only those who believe in Christ but those who become one in Christ!