

“Blessed to Me God’s Presence in Each Moment”

Psalm 113, Psalm 139

Matthew 6:11

September 17, 2017

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“This.”

“What?”

“This. Today I’m meditating on ‘this’.”

“On this what?”

“On the word ‘this’. Today I’m focusing on the word ‘this’.”

A couple of weeks ago I was standing in the main office when the phone rang. Linda Clark, office manager, picked up the call with a warm greeting, listened for a moment then smiled, handed the phone to me saying, “It’s Josephine Bryant with a message for the pastor.”

For those of you who have not met Ms. Bryant, you have not been blessed like those of us who have. She is one of our homebound, living now in a memory care unit in a nursing care facility here in Lexington. Although she is on a memory care unit, she enthusiastically shares stories of her religious upbringing including her time at Woodland with Hayes Farish.

I put the phone to my ear, “Good morning, Miss Jo!”

Her greeting in return was one word ‘This’.

‘Um, excuse me? What?’

‘This. Today I’m meditating on ‘this’. Today I’m focusing on the word ‘this’. THIS is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. THIS is the day. THIS day. WE have been given THIS very day. What a gift it is, isn’t it? That’s all. I just wanted to give that to you for your sermon.’ And she hung up.

I smiled as I gave Linda back the phone. How did she know? How did she know that I was at that time putting together a five week series of ‘blessings’ as understood by the ancient Celtic Christians with the first Sunday of the series focused on the blessing of God’s presence in each moment, in THIS day?

In ancient Celtic form we can say, ‘Blessed to me the gift of this day.’

‘Celtic’ is the name given to the people who lived in the far western reaches of the Roman Empire when that empire moved into that area in the fourth century, the land we now know as Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Britain. Roman Christians and Catholic missionaries brought their religion with them to the far reaches of the British Isles and it took root in the fertile culture of the Celts, mixed with druid influences. In her book, “Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me: Celtic Blessings”, author Jan Richardson writes, “As Christianity took root in the culture of the Celts, the resulting spirituality kept a strong Celtic personality. Celtic Christians acknowledged God’s presence through the living Christ in every aspect of living – from waking to sleeping, from birth to death, from mundane chores to momentous celebrations. They perceived God’s creation as a

holy gift. (12). Today we often use the word ‘blessing’ to mean fortune or favor. In Celtic Christianity, ‘blessing’ can be understood as the very stuff of life, not something necessarily favored, good, special or extraordinary – *but all of life as a gift*.

For the next five Sundays, through poetry, music and sermon we will immerse ourselves in the ancient Celtic understanding of blessings. It’s a five-week pilgrimage of sorts, with the hope that along the way we open ourselves to new ways of encountering the Holy.

Today we begin with ‘this’. This day. Each day. In our modern times and urban settings, we so often lose touch with being present in the moment, experiencing our time now – not looking to the past nor to tomorrow but our time right this moment as a gift, a blessing in whatever it holds. In her book *Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me*, Jan Richardson uses the style of Celtic poetry in her own writings. As we focus on ‘this’ on this day, let’s start with one of her poems about the beginning of the day.

“Bless Our Waking” p. 25, ‘Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me’, read by Joanna
Bless this day and all who wake.
Bless all who wake.

Bless this day and all who weep.
Bless all who weep.

Bless this day and all who fear.
Bless all who fear.

Bless this day and all who laugh.
Bless all who laugh.

Bless this day and all who hunger.
Bless all who hunger.

Bless this day and all who hope.
Bless all who hope.

Bless *this* day.

Would we be more open to encountering God in our day if we were to begin with that reflection as we awake?

The Big Book of AA has the following words for the beginning of our day:

‘On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self seeking motives.’

‘Blessed to me God’s presence in each moment.’

Bless to me *this* day and guide us in living it as a blessing.

That powerful word ‘this’, it’s a part of the prayer that we pray together each Sunday; from Matthew 6, when the disciples ask Jesus how to pray, he instructs them, and in verse 11 prays, “Give us THIS day, our daily bread.” We often think of it metaphorically but scholars think it was quite literal at the time; a prayer for those who we would call ‘day laborers’ today, those who went out each day seeking work, knowing that their securing work for today would determine weather or not their family would eat tomorrow. A morning prayer for those who economically could only look to this day. Lest we forget, there are so many in our world, in our country today who refer to this prayer in the same way, literally, give us this day. Most of us, on the other hand, focus so much on the future, we have that luxury. And so the prayer for us is more of a reminder to be aware of the bounty of this day, not the storing up for tomorrow. ‘Give us *this* day....’ We pray for only this moment, this day.

We hear the words from Matthew and are reminded of THIS day. And we are gifted with the psalms as well. We began worship with words from Psalm 113, words of thanksgiving and praise to a God who is both transcendent and immanent; both out in the heavens and within, both mystery/might and so very close and present at the same time. ⁴

“The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens.
who is seated on high,
⁶ who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?
⁷ He raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap”

We heard verses from Psalm 139 as well, one of my favorite Psalms. We can call it the “You know me” psalm. The psalmist writes of how God knows us, really knows us, in our waking, in our sleeping, in our thoughts, in our actions. Not as a puppet master, for we are given freedom to choose our actions. Rather, as one who knows motive and intention and is to direct and guide if only we would allow.

And as we go about our day to day it’s not easy to hold that awareness, as we hurriedly get breakfast, shower, get dressed and out the door; as we get kids to school, as we navigate traffic and juggle work schedules or family schedules or whatever the day may bring schedules. This sense of blessing slips into the background of our day.

If only we could pack up this sense of thanksgiving and praise, this sense of God’s presence with us in each moment and carry it throughout our day. If only we would allow ourselves to refocus, to bend on knee midday in prayer:

‘Bless Our Midday’ p. 28, “Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me, Richard Day reading

AT THE MIDDAY by Beth Richardson

*Bless this midday,
A break in my busyness,
A time to rest, renew, refresh
from the challenges of the morning.
Bless this food.
Bless this pause,
Bless this rest.*

*Remind me that this day,
This whole life,
Is a gift from you.*

*May I breathe in Spirit,
Breathe in strength,
Breathe in wisdom.*

*Fill this food,
Fill this pause,
Fill this rest.*

I am yours.

To live each moment of the day in thanksgiving and praise is asking the impossible. Even the psalmists, in their psalms of lament, recognized that there are times when the pain of life is so present that all else fades to the background. And today, this very day, in the midst of all of the news of hurricane damage, in the midst of news of a new terrorist bombing in London, as so many of us struggle with a plethora of issues of social justice which align with our religious teachings of a God who welcomes and loves and affirms all – and all means all – it seems almost Pollyannaish, it seems almost a luxury to take a moment and bask in a sense of gratitude. For the gift of ‘this day’, this time that is in so many ways messed up and spiraling out of control?

Yes. Especially now. It’s imperative to ground ourselves in gratitude. To, as we struggle, continue to find the presence of God in our day, for that is what lifts us up, heals the cuts and bruises of the world and keeps us going. In an old Irish Homily is the proverb, “They who are not grateful for the blessings of God are a temple and dwelling place of the Devil.”

Being able to stop, take a deep breath and breathe in a word of thanks, maybe if only for the blessing of that particular moment and that particular breath, allows us to continue to be agents of love and light in a world that often seems to be spinning out of control.

Even on those dark and seemingly hopeless days, especially on those days, let us, as we prepare to sleep, utter a prayer in the night:

Night, read by Rita Day

*Bless this night.
The light gives way to the darkness,
And another day is done.*

*Bless those I have met this day
And those whose faces come to my mind.*

*Bless the smiles, words, and thoughts
That touched your creatures, large and small.*

*Forgive, O God, the sins of your servant this day:
The unkind word or thought,
The deed of which I am ashamed.
Forgive me, that I may find rest in you.*

*Bless this house, this pillow, this bed.
May I lie down in your peace and love,
And awake again to be your hands and heart in the world.
I am yours, God of love.
Bless this night.*

Amen