



Worship Service Theme: Blessing

Helpful elements:

Green table covering (Ordinary Time)

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time. Our theme for today is **blessing**. What do you think blessing means? *[pause for feedback]*

It turns out that blessing is all over the scriptures; in fact, it seems like one of God's most frequent actions is to bless his people, and one of God's people's most frequent actions is to bless or thank God. So today in our worship service, we'll hear more about blessing and some stories about being blessed.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes all understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," together:

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou
anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell
in the house of the Lord forever.

Suggested Hymns:

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Amazing Grace

First reading: Genesis 12:1-3. This is from the very first book in the Bible. From the earliest times of God's interactions with people, God promises that as we are blessed by him, we are empowered to be a blessing to others.

¹Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

Holy, Holy, Holy

Jesus Loves Me

Second reading: Psalm 103:1-5

¹Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!

²Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,

³who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,

⁴who redeems your life from the pit,

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
⁵ who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

Great is Thy Faithfulness

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

Interactive Homily: Let's think a little more about blessing.

- What do you think a blessing is?
 - The dictionary defines blessing in several ways: giving an expression of favor or fondness; gratitude ("bless you for doing that!"), and even sympathy.
- What kinds of blessings do we give in everyday situations?
 - Three times a day we bless *[pause for feedback]* ... our food!
 - We bless family, especially children and grandchildren, asking God to help and guide them.
 - We even bless the Lord, give thanks to God.
- Why do we bless God? What does God do that leads us to bless God? From Psalm 103, the Lord:
 - "forgives all your iniquity,
 - heals all your diseases,
 - redeems your life from the pit,
 - crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
 - satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's"
- How do you *feel* when you are "blessed"?
 - Happy!
 - Deeper contentment, a sense of peacefulness, well-being and safety, of being spiritually settled.
 - A sense of renewal: hope, energy, guidance to move forward
- God promises that as we are blessed, we are empowered to be a blessing to others.

- In Genesis 12:2, God says to Abram: “I will bless you and make your name great *so that* you will be a blessing.”
- How can we share our blessings with others? How can we be a blessing, creating a ripple effect of blessing?
 - First: Count your blessings! What have you seen God do in your life?
 - Talk about your blessings with others: meals, beautiful weather, visits, a great joke you heard ...
 - Pay attention to blessings around you and comment on them. Notice blessings in your own life and the good you see in people and situations.

Let’s take a moment to silently pray and reflect on our blessings and how to bless others.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord’s prayer together:

Lord’s Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Suggested Hymns:

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands

Third Reading: A true story about blessing, called “A Big Bag of Shoes,” by Keith Rawlinson¹

There was a woman in church who had found herself a single mother. She had very little money and was finding it difficult to provide for her children. She could no longer afford the house she was renting, so she had to move out of the house and into an apartment. Since the move was just across town, this single mother saved time by packing all their belongings into boxes and garbage bags.

¹ edited from <http://www.eclecticsite.com/bigbagofshoes.html>

The next day, after the move was complete and she had unpacked everything, she realized that the garbage bag into which she had packed her and her children's shoes was missing. She drove back to the rental house and asked the landlord if he had seen the bag of shoes. With sincere apology, the landlord told her that he did see the bag of shoes, but since it was in a garbage bag, he assumed it was trash and had thrown it away.

The woman was devastated. Her church shoes and her work shoes, and her children's school shoes, were all in that bag. Now they were gone, and she couldn't afford to replace them.

Someone at church heard about the situation, decided to be an answer to prayer, and spent their own money to replace all of the shoes the woman and her children had lost.

This is an interesting look at how God blesses us! God could have just provided this single mom with some extra money to replace the shoes; or someone could have just given her money to replace the shoes. But instead, God chose to bless the woman with a big bag of shoes, a creative blessing that provided exactly what she needed.

Suggested Hymns:

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

Shall We Gather at the River

Fourth Reading: A blessing by author John O'Donohue, in his book *To Bless the Space Between Us*:

Like the joy of the sea coming home to shore,
May the relief of laughter rinse through your soul.
As the wind loves to call things to dance,
May your gravity be lightened by grace.
Like the dignity of moonlight restoring the earth,
May your thoughts incline with reverence and respect.
As water takes whatever shape it is in,
So free may you be about who you become. ...
May your prayer of listening deepen enough

to hear in the depths the laughter of God.

Suggested Hymns:

Blest Be the Tie that Binds

Blessed Assurance

And now please receive the closing blessing, taken from Numbers 6:24-26, when God instructs Moses to give this blessing to the leaders so that they may bless the people.

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)

[Extra material]

Quotes on Blessing

The unthankful heart discovers no mercies; but the thankful heart will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings. –Henry Ward Beecher, American Congregationalist clergyman

When we lose one blessing, another is often most unexpectedly given in its place. –writer C.S. Lewis

Be kind and do good for any one and that will be reflected. The ripples of the kind heart are the highest blessings of the Universe. –Indian author Amit Ray

Shine your soul with the same
egoless humility as the rainbow
and no matter where you go
in this world or the next,
love will find you, attend you, and bless you. –Aberjhani, American historian,
poet, and artist