

Bless to Me
 Passages: Special Moments
 7.2.17
 Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
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 Text: Luke 1: 57-80

As we've been learning during our Bless to Me worship series, Celtic Christians bless all seasons and matters of life, both the joyful and difficult passages.

One of the most joyful events of life is the blessing related to the birth of a baby. There is the matter of the baby's name. Much thought and effort often go into this matter.

It would seem that the parents of the baby should have the primary say so in naming a baby. However, there are often family expectations and cultural traditions which seem to override the parent's decision.

My sister, Candice is carrying on an interesting tradition of naming boys. The males all receive Charles as a first name but are called by their middle names. Her husband's name is Charles William but he is known as Bill, their son is Charles Andrew and is known as Drew, and Drew and Mindy's baby is Charles Marcus and is called Marcus.

In older Jewish tradition, the baby is named after a relative, often a deceased relative. More modern versions of this tradition involves choosing a name that sounds like the relative's name or begins with the same letter as the relative's name.

In today's text, we see that Elizabeth and Zechariah face the neighbor's expectations/assumptions that their baby will be named after his father. But instead the baby is named John.

You may remember from past sermons about Zechariah that he and his wife Elizabeth are quite old when an angel tells Zechariah that they will have a child. Because Zachariah doubts the prophecy, he loses the ability to speak and does not regain it until the baby is born and he confirms by writing on a tablet that the child's name will be John.

So when the neighbors come together to celebrate and bless that baby born to Elizabeth and Zechariah, they also are giving God thanks for the blessing that Zechariah could speak again. Not only could he speak, but he come to believe that this son of his, John will be a prophet of the Most High and will go to prepare the way for the coming Messiah.

So we see in today's lesson, the blessing of several passages of life:

- The pregnancy of an older woman who along with her spouse longed for a child
- The father's loss of speech
- The safe birth of the baby
- The neighbors and relatives rejoicing at the birth of the baby.
- The naming of the baby based on the angel's direction
- The father's speech returned
- The knowledge that this baby is appointed by God to be the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

You may be wondering how Zechariah's loss of speech might be seen as a blessing. It was only after living with his affliction, that Zechariah comes to accept the direction of the angel, Gabriel that his son's name will be John and that his son will (as the angel prophesizes) become a Prophet and pave the way for the Messiah.

Think of the passages in your own life that at first glance did not seem to be a blessing but ended up being so.

Sharon Bonner who has been worshipping with us for quite a while has a special relationship with children in our community whose lives are difficult at best. Sharon sees blessings in these children where others may see hopelessness. She saw a great need for them to be fed over the summer and God laid it on her heart that she needed to help. She would have loved to offer a lunch feeding program here but with everything going on with Trinity, I referred her to Pastor Charlie Marshall at Immanuel Lutheran Church.

To be completely honest, when Sharon first told me about this, I was doubtful. It seemed impossible. There was all the food needed and then there was all the help needed! Both seemed impossible to me especially when Sharon wanted to get this all together in one week! But scriptures tell us that all things are possible for those who love the Lord! So with lots of community support, the Holy Spirit's guidance, and Sharon's response to God's call, the Kids Feeding Kids program kicked off on June 19.

The program began by feeding 6 children and now is up to 30. The teens who help in the Kids Feeding Kids program earn community service hours. Our God is an awesome God who provides us special moments to bless (even if we doubt they will come to fruition)!

The United Church of Christ Synod began this past Friday in Baltimore. Those in our congregation who have been at Synod have had the embarrassment of seeing me be shameless in telling people about our ceiling. Sheldon Culver, the first interim Conference Minister for the Central Atlantic Conference after John Deckenback's death asked me immediately where my square was. A square is a little gizmo you get on your cell phone which accepts credit cards. Sheldon was all ready to make a donation. Another person, James Darnell who went to seminary with me and is looking for a call opened up his wallet and gave me two dollars.

One pastor from our association who learned of our building situation asked Sue and me why Trinity didn't build a new church or join forces with one of our sister churches. We laughed and said if we did that I would be looking for a new call.

In some respects, that pastor's suggestions have some validity. After we get the roof repaired and the tin ceiling back in place, we are still dealing with a 150 year old building which needs the kitchen and bathrooms updated, has inadequate space for expanding programs, screams badly for new carpet in the sanctuary, and has no elevator. And \$300,000 would go a long way in feeding God's sheep.

But in the end what I believe is that this adversity will be a blessing to our congregation. The opportunity to persist in the face of this difficulty will make us stronger both in terms of our faith and our ability to trust God to make a way when there appears to be no way.

Let us not doubt God as Zechariah did, lest we lose our ability to speak of God's goodness. \$300,000 is a very large sum of money which can only come from our willingness to trust in God's provision for us individually and as a congregation.

What I believe is if we are faithful, God will be faithful. If by God Almighty's grace, we restore this building which has been a spiritual home to many of you and many before you, God will use our building to be of greater service.

All passages of life can be seen as special moments to be lifted up as blessings. May we have hearts to believe this. Amen.