

Bless to Me
Through the Day: Celebrating God's Presence in Each Moment
6.11.17
Trinity Sunday, Year A
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Text: Psalm 113 and Matthew 6:11

"Bless to Me" ~ that's the title of our new worship series! And who couldn't use a little more blessing?

Beginning today and through the end of July we will be focusing on the concept of blessing. We are quite used to blessing God's name as we heard in today's Psalm 113. And we are accustomed to blessing our food and saying the Lord's Prayer.

During our series, we are going to expand our view of blessings. We will explore the ways in which we are blessed and the ways in which we might bless the people and the everyday matters in our lives.

To be blessed and to bless are both healing. We as individuals, our families, our congregation, our community, our country, and our world could use more blessing right now.

During our Bless to Me series, we will draw on Celtic Christianity because the Celts have a tradition of what are known as "blessing prayers" which have endured through centuries. These blessings reveal a sense of the holy in every moment, in everything, in every person. This is a way of living—of observing and celebrating, blessing and being blessed by the ordinary acts and encounters of life.

At the heart of Celtic Christianity is simply living the life, following the Way, travelling the journey of life including the pain and the pleasure, the heartaches and the hopes, as well the disappointments and the dreams.

Celtic Christianity's view of life as a journey results in blessings for various times of the day, various stages of life, one's coming as well as one's going (whether on a trip to another part of the state or country or coming into or leaving this life.)

So, we will journey with the Celtic Christians for 7 weeks. Most journeys to a new place begin by learning something about that culture or place. That is where we will start today.

Celtic tradition is typically associated with Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and Northern England. What would we want to draw on these traditions as part of our worship? Doing so reminds us of our ties to other Christians. The Evangelical and Reformed strand of the UCC which Trinity UCC has German roots. The Episcopal Church's roots are English and the Presbyterian Church's roots are Scottish. There are segments of the Catholic Church which are deeply connected to the Irish.

Celtic Christianity worship emphasizes (and so will our series) the following:

Trinity-This is easy for us because Trinity is part of our identity and today is Trinity Sunday. We will be singing a different doxology during this series which emphasizes the Trinity.

Creation-Nature is seen as sacred. Each Sunday as we sing Morning Has Broken we will be reminded of the sacredness of creation.

God's/Christ's presence is everywhere and all around us. We will be reminded of this as each week we sing our closing hymn Christ Be Beside Me.

Belief in angels and saints -We will hear this reflected each week as part of our Gathering Blessing. You'll also see that we've added two large angels to our worship space.

Belief in thin places-The ancient pagan Celts, and later, Christians, used this term to describe places where the boundary between heaven and earth seemed especially thin. These are places where we can sense God's presence more readily. "Heaven and earth," the Celtic saying goes, "are only three feet apart, but in thin places that distance is even shorter." Two of the beloved thin places for Celtic Christians are Iona, an island off Scotland and Northumbria in Northeastern England. We will be using resources from both communities during our series.

Circle-The circle can be found in Celtic crosses as displayed on our bulletin, on the screen, on the altar cloth, and on my stole. Circles are symbolic of community which is central to Celtic Christianity just as community is central Trinity United Church of Christ.

Blessing-All of life is sacred and everyone and everything is to be blessed in all circumstances. Blessings are the core thread of our series.

In his book, *To Bless the Space Between Us*, John O'Donohue, a beloved modern Irish writer wrote this about blessing:

In the parched deserts of postmodernity, a blessing can be like the discovery of a fresh well. It would be lovely if we could rediscover our power to bless one another. I believe each of us can bless. When a blessing is invoked, it changes the atmosphere...

In the light and reverence of blessing, a person or situation becomes illuminated in a completely new way. In a dead wall a new window opens, in dense darkness a path starts to glimmer, and into a broken heart healing falls like morning dew.

Let us begin to learn how to bless one another. Whenever you give a blessing, a blessing returns to enfold you.¹

Our worship focus today is Celebrating God's Presence in Each Moment and the opportunity to see blessings in the everyday. In her book, *Christ Beside Me, Christ Within: Celtic Blessings*, Beth Richardson writes of the blessings associated with:

Walking the Dog

Coffee

A Bird Nest

A Summer Day

Washing the Dishes

This Sabbath Day

Here is Richardson's Blessing for The Sabbath:

Bless to me this new day.

The sounds and sights

And smells and tastes.

The cool breeze on my cheek

And the warm sun on my head.

Bless to me this sabbath time.

Space to rest, to play,

To feel the fullness of this life.

¹ John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us*, Doubleday Publishers, NY, NY 2008

Bless to me this gift of plenty.
Of food and shelter,
Of peace and safety,
Of freedom from worry
And abundance to share.

Bless to me this space
To hold in love all those
Who struggle in life,
Who wait for diagnoses,
Who sit in sorrow,
Who walk and wait and run in fear.

Bless the earth
And all its creatures.
Bless to me this new day.²

Richardson also speaks of her beloved Grandfather Tom and the way he blest her. She writes:

I was the first grandchild. Grandpa taught me to hold up one finger in the air. "You're number one," he said, But all the grandchildren were "number one" to him. When I displeased Grandma and she was scolding me, Grandpa would say to Grandma, "Let her be. She's doing pretty good."³

After the sermon today, you will have an opportunity to identify a saying with which your father, grandfather, or a father figure has blest you.

You'll find a blue index card in your bulletin. We will complete these cards while Ben plays For the Beauty of the Earth. The cards may be placed in the offering plate later in the service and will be included in next Sunday's bulletin in honor of Father's Day.

Amen.

² Beth A Richardson, Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me: Celtic Blessings, Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN 2016

³ Ibid