

Counting Blessings

Psalm 67

August 16, 2020

First Presbyterian Church, Luling

Typically, the hottest part of the summer, for which this week surely qualifies, is not the time of year when we count our blessings. That activity is usually scheduled for November, as Thanksgiving gets close. It's a little silly that we restrict ourselves to counting our blessings—at least out loud and intentionally, and where other people can hear us—to once a year. As if it would be too....what? Too braggy? Too unseemly? Too rude somehow? To do it too often, though we surely need to.

I've told you this before, but now I'm impressed with myself because I've stuck with it for way longer than I thought I would have to. Beginning the last Sunday we met in person, which was March 15, I started a habit, a discipline, a commitment of some sort, that as long as this pandemic time lasted, I would post things I was thankful for each day on my facebook page. And I have. That first day, I was thankful for bluebonnets, baby calves, and our congregation. I took two weeks off when I took vacation, but other than that, I've not missed a day.

Some days, it's hard to think of something. Those are the days I will end up saying something like "air conditioning, chocolate, and bedtime." But I am genuinely thankful for all three of those things, so it's true. Some days it's easy to think of things. I find myself noting things throughout the day that I'm going to write down, and lots of days I end up with more than three. Even on days that seem much like the day before and the day before that and the one before that too, I've been able to find things to be thankful for. I know I've repeated some things—for instance, just about every Sunday, like that first one in March, I say that I'm grateful to be able to gather with you all for church.

This is not to say that I'm 100% cheerful and optimistic all day, every day. Just like all of us, I am sad at the things I've lost, the things I've had to put on pause, the plans and dreams I had that can't be fulfilled. I wish I could go hug Helen and each one of you. I so wish we could gather together for worship and some donuts, even though I don't even like donuts. I would eat one, if it could be with y'all. I wish I could thoughtlessly run to HEB without weighing how risky it is. I wish I felt safe sending my kids to school. I wish I could make some plans beyond tomorrow and have confidence that I could carry them out. It hit me the other day that I really miss the smell of coffee. I don't drink coffee. But I used to have lots of meetings with other people in coffee shops, or at Mom's Front Porch, or just in some fellowship hall somewhere, that would smell of coffee, and that coffee smell would linger on my clothes for the rest of the day. I miss that. Ridiculous. Because it's clear that what I'm missing is being able to meet with people in all those places, the things that seemed routine and normal and boring, even burdensome sometimes, but now that they're gone, I miss them.

But I have found that creating a discipline of closing my day by thinking of what I'm thankful for, of counting my blessings, has helped my outlook immensely. It's easy to focus on what I've given up, but focusing on what I have and what I've gained, has helped me keep moving forward.

Counting blessings, remembering what God has done and continues to do, is firmly rooted in the traditions of Old and New Testaments. Today's Psalm 67, short though it is, summarizes things nicely. May God be gracious to us and bless us. It names some of those blessings as God judging the people with equity, with fairness, and guiding the nations upon the earth. Those haven't made one of my thankful lists, but I am indeed thankful for God's justice and guidance. The Psalmist then names the harvest as a blessing—that's the "earth has yielded its increase" bit at the end. God our God has blessed us. May God continue to bless us.

God has blessed us. May God continue to bless us. This psalm, like so many of them, is in the plural. The psalmist isn't so interested in what has made me thankful today, as he is in what has made us thankful today. So I've been thinking of some things that we as a church, as a culture, can be thankful for

in these days. I'll admit that I started a discussion with my Luling colleagues on this topic as a way to get their ideas, too. What are our blessings in these days, as a church? It's a blessing that we've held steady in our worship participation, steadier really than we have when we could meet in person. It's a blessing that so many of us are here each week, together. It's a blessing that we have been able to include people who have more difficulties coming to church in person—whether those difficulties are from illness or distance or work obligations. It's a blessing, like I said last week, that we have been able to do things differently and creatively, that we aren't stuck in "the way we've always done things." It's a blessing that the Spirit has opened our eyes to dream new dreams, about what our church could do and who our church could reach. It's a blessing that we've realized in a renewed way, how important joining together for worship is. I don't think I'm alone in that, anyway. This next one is a little harder to see as a blessing, but I'm going to claim it for us. It's a blessing that we won't be returning to normal. Even when we're able to gather and do things we're used to doing, it won't be exactly the same. And there will be things to grieve about that. But it won't be the same, because we are different. We have been changed and don't see things exactly the same way we did before. That's a blessing, to have our eyes opened in new ways. Rick Perkins, from out at McNeil Baptist, said the other day "Jesus didn't call us to be normal anyway. Jesus wasn't normal. Jesus called us to be faithful."

Which brings us back to the psalm. Throughout the Old Testament and into the New, God does not bless people just for the sake of blessing them, just being nice. God blesses people, as God told Abraham, "to be a blessing." Our mission as disciples, as disciples who have been blessed by God, is to make God's way known upon the earth, the psalmist says. And to let the ends of the earth revere God. Each time the psalmist talks about "us" being blessed, he turns it so that the nations are blessed too.

God our God has blessed us. Let us be faithful disciples by blessing others.