
My Sermon from Sunday July 11, 2021, '7th Sunday after Pentecost' ~

"Count Your Blessings"

Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. Amen

I find that one of the hardest things I do every week in my sermon prayers and preparation is to decide which scripture appointed for the week is the one that I will be using for my sermon inspiration. This week was no different. I started off thinking that I would preach on David bringing the Ark of The Covenant into Jerusalem. The ark held the 10 Commandments, the rod of Aaron, and some manna that sustained the Hebrews in the wilderness. David was so excited that he danced before the Lord with all his might and he shouted with joy. There were songs and tambourines and castanets and harps and cymbals. Then I moved to the gospel which was the tragic tale of the murder of John the Baptist by King Herod. This happened on the night of Herod's birthday party. Due to a promise he had made to Herodias because she had danced so well, he had John beheaded and his head put on a platter and brought into a room where the birthday celebration was going on. We celebrated my husband Jouni's birthday yesterday and I cannot imagine seeing someone's head brought into the room at the same time as the birthday cake. Well, in the case of Jouni, it wasn't cake but 2 of his favourite pies.

I finally settled on the passage appointed for today from Paul's letter to Christians in Ephesus ~ what we know as Ephesians, chapter 1, verses 3-14. As soon as Paul writes his opening greeting, he continues on with a listing of spiritual blessings that you and I receive in Christ.

A group of seniors were sitting outside of *Tim's* and talking about all of their ailments while drinking coffee. One said, *"My arms are so weak I can barely lift up my coffee cup."* Another one said, *"My cataracts are so bad, I can barely see my coffee."* A third person said, *"My hands are so crippled that I can barely write my name."* A 4th person said, *"What? Speak up. I can't hear anybody."* The 5th person said, *"My blood pressure pills make me really dizzy."* The 6th person added, *"I can barely turn my head because of the arthritis in my neck."* The 7th said, *"I often forget where I am going,"* The others all nodded and said that getting old is not for sissies. The last person looked around at them and said, *"We need to stop looking at the negative and start accentuating the positive. Let's count our blessings. I'll start: At least we can all still drive!!"*

Counting our blessings is important. We need to focus on the good things in our lives. Even in the midst of the pandemic there have been blessings. I have enjoyed a chance to slow down and to spend more time at home. We were able to get our live-streaming equipment and a new sound system for the church. This enables us to reach out and worship with people all around the world. Many of us have received the blessings of two vaccines. I haven't been able to shop or buy clothes or get my hair cut and so another blessing is that I have saved a lot of money.

The apostle Paul knew the significance of counting our blessings. Here he was under house arrest in Rome, and yet he still reminded the Christians in Ephesus of their spiritual blessings that came from their Christian faith. He writes that we have every spiritual blessing.



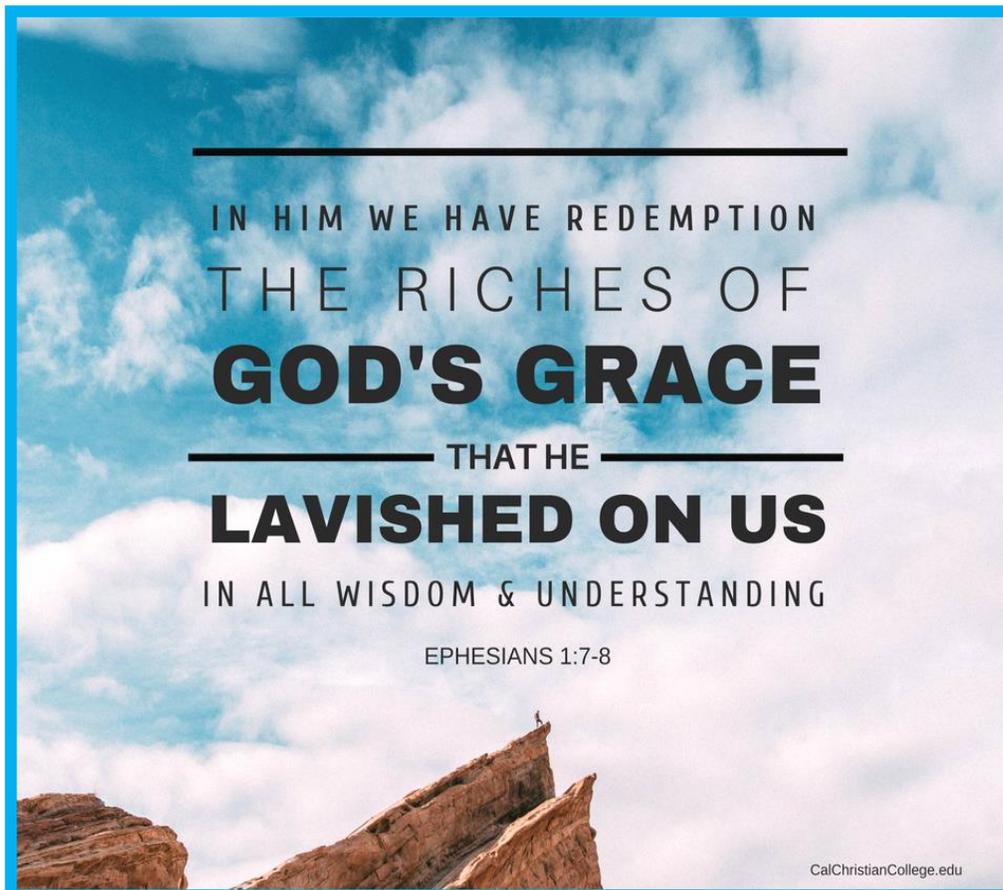
Now that is really something!

Paul is so excited about our spiritual blessings that he puts them at the beginning of his letter, right after the salutation. I wonder what he thought were his blessings of being under house arrest in Rome? Perhaps converting his Roman guards. Receiving lots of time to write to his friends. Having visitors come and speak with him. Feeling the energy of the eternal city.

And of course the following spiritual blessings which are the most important of all. Here's what Paul listed: (from Chapter 1, verses 3 – 14.

1. Christ chose us because he loves us
2. Christ has adopted us as his children
3. We have glorious grace
4. We have the riches of grace that Jesus has lavished upon us
5. Christ has shared with us the wonders of God's will
6. We share in God's plan that unites heaven and earth
7. We are all named in God's will ~ we have an eternal inheritance
8. We live to praise God and we receive God's glory
9. When we believe and are baptized we are marked forever with the Holy Spirit
10. We have received our salvation through faith

Which one of these blessings, and I counted to 10, is really speaking to you today? I love that God has adopted me and lavished grace upon me. You and I are named as beneficiaries in God's will. Over my nearly 21 years in parish ministry, I have noticed how happy people get when they are named to receive a bequest in a will. When the church receives a bequest, we receive an envelope from a lawyer in the mail and it is exciting to see the name of the church listed as a recipient of a person's generosity.

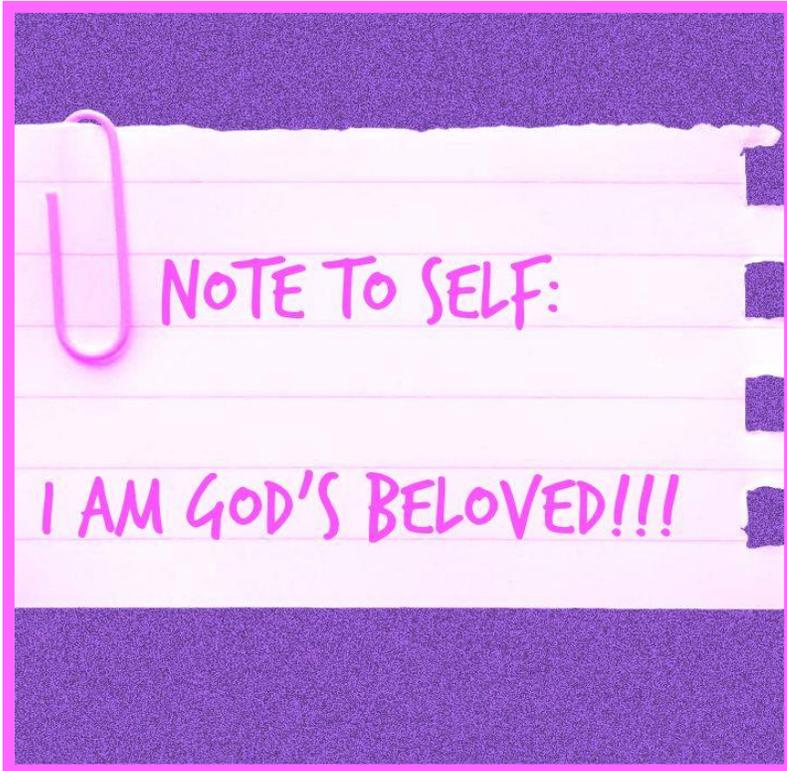


Paul writes that Jesus lavishes grace on all of us. Isn't that a glorious word, LAVISH. It means to bestow something and do it with extravagant generosity. Grandparents lavish love on their grandchildren. Pet owners lavish attention on their pets. Successful entrepreneurs lavish follow-up care on their clients.

People in this parish lavish many things to this parish and I am forever grateful.

May you and I always count our spiritual blessings and do this each and every day. Instead of counting sheep at night, count your spiritual blessings.

- ♥ God has adopted me.
- ♥ I am God's beloved.
- ♥ I share in God's inheritance.
- ♥ I am blessed with eternal life.
- ♥ I am an adopted child of God.



Adoption, inheritance, redemption and grace. All in one lavish package of blessings.

Life doesn't get any better than this!
Thank you God!

Archdeacon Deborah+
