

"Sunday words" from Pastor Susan

March 3, 2019

Good morning from a still slippery hill in Rockport!

Our theme for this morning in worship is blessings -- the blessings of God as they are detailed in the Bible, specifically -- if you are of a mind to take up and read -- in the prophet Jeremiah's words from the Hebrew Scriptures (Jeremiah 17:5-10), and from the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament (Luke 6:17-26).

When I was a new preacher and pastor in 1999-2000 I found it hard to say to someone I was visiting, "Can I say a prayer for you?" Since I didn't grow up in the church, and religious jargon and practice were not a part of my life up until the time I began seminary in 1995, I found that saying anything about praying felt foreign and just not an action I was comfortable doing. But a friend said to me, "Could you say you would like to offer a blessing, instead of a prayer?" And I said, "Of course! A blessing I could genuinely offer, a prayer seemed fake or somehow just not something I could say legitimately.

Both are important.... To me, a prayer is a *request* for something or a thanks for something -- a healing, perhaps, or a renewal. The 23rd Psalm comes to mind, or the Lord's Prayer. A blessing is a *giving* of something -- a bestowal or delivery of comfort, assurance, or promise. The well known blessing of the Book of Numbers in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, comes to mind. It begins, "May God bless you and keep you...."

Comfort, assurance, promise -- don't we all want to hear those words? Sometimes prayers can seem to go unanswered. The sick baby dies anyway. The aging friend, parent, or partner doesn't recover. But blessings can help us get through seemingly unanswered prayers -- comfort, assurance, promise in the midst of loss. And sometimes blessings open us up to unexpected good. Sometimes what seems to be bad, in the moment, turns out to lead to good in the long run. A cancer is found because something else was being examined -- thus treatments can begin, sooner rather than too late. A job is lost, and then a better opportunity comes along that wouldn't have happened had the job not been lost. A death occurs and somehow, miraculously?, a new and even more fulfilling life begins for the loved one who remains. A "blessing in disguise"....

What if we could see each day as a blessing in disguise? What if we offered words of comfort, assurance and promise to one another each day, no matter the circumstance of each day? Offer someone a blessing today. Who knows what might come back to you as a blessing in disguise....

My blessings to all reading these "Sunday words" this day! Susan

p.s. We will have an Ash Wednesday Service this Wednesday, March 6th at 6 p.m. in our sanctuary. All are welcome to participate in this time of sacred remembrance that we come from dust and it is to dust we return. Ashes will be provided for all who choose to come forward to receive them on their foreheads.

Ash Wednesday begins the Season of Lent. Instead of offering a study group in Lent (I just couldn't work out the timing!), I will be sending out a daily meditation via e-mail throughout Lent and will have them available in paper form each Sunday for the prior week for those who are not on line. I will also be available for individual conversations around those daily meditations with those who have concerns they would like to share with me. You can reach me via my cell phone number or my e-mail address, both of which are given in the Sunday bulletins.