

Isaiah 51:1-6

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

Psalm 138

*1 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; *
before the gods I will sing your praise.*

*2 I will bow down toward your holy temple
and praise your Name, *
because of your love and faithfulness;*

*3 For you have glorified your Name *
and your word above all things.*

*4 When I called, you answered me; *
you increased my strength within me.*

*5 All the kings of the earth will praise you, O Lord, *
when they have heard the words of your mouth.*

*6 They will sing of the ways of the Lord, *
that great is the glory of the Lord.*

*7 Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly; *
he perceives the haughty from afar.*

*8 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; *
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;
your right hand shall save me.*

*9 The Lord will make good his purpose for me; *
O Lord, your love endures for ever;
do not abandon the works of your hands.*

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

The Gospel - Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

You know, often when Peter pulls some less than exemplary move, I typically say with a smile... "You just have to love Peter. He is so us." I mean, let's face it, he really is. Out on the water he just can't help but to be drawn away from trusting Jesus by the distraction of the wind and the waves of the world. At the top of the Mount of Transfiguration he wants to settle in and keep Moses, and Elijah, and Jesus all to himself in a couple of snazzy new shelters that he wants to build. Ready to follow Satan's lead by telling the Son of God that he, Peter, was going to divert God's plan through human intervention by blocking the action of the rapidly approaching cross. And then when the cross does come, three times he denied he even knew Jesus. When it comes to Peter, I could go on and on. He is so us. Untrusting, fearful, led by the world, self-possessive of salvation, always fighting for "control" to the point of his will being done instead of God's.

And today we see that Peter is something else. Given all that we have just heard, we brace ourselves. What could it be now? Well, here it is. Get ready. He is blessed! "Blessed are you, Simon, Son of Jonah." You just have to love Peter. He is so ...US!

Can you imagine what it must have been like to have the Son of God, the Messiah, himself, turn to you and tell you that you have been, and are, BLESSED! "Blessed are you, Simon, bar Jonah." I wonder if Peter really knew the full impact of that statement.

You know what the definition of blessed is, right? We tend to get this confused. We say bless you when we sneeze as a kind gesture of wishing the sneezer good health. Some of us say "have a blessed day", as a parting farewell, similar to "See ya later", when we separate. I even say, "The blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you this day and remain with you always" at the end of our worship, as a kind of a capstone to our gathering. But, do we really know what it means? Do we really understand what we are saying? Well, here is the definition. The condition of blessedness or the act of being blessed is the condition of, or act of, being made holy. And to be holy is to be consecrated to God. Is that how we use it? And if that is what we mean, if it is truly more than a wish for good health or a way to say goodbye, do we really comprehend how to get there, how to achieve that state of being?

Well, if we are not sure, I recommend that we go back and read the passages for this Sunday again. Here is how God tells the people through his prophet Isaiah. If you want to be blessed, then follow in the footsteps of your ancestor Abraham, and here are God's words, "Listen to me, my people. Give heed to me, my nation. For a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples." Do we want to be blessed? Do we want, as it says in Isaiah, that the waste places in the world be comforted? Do we want wilderness places transformed back into Eden and deserts into gardens? Do we want creation to be reinfused with joy and gladness and thanksgiving with a song in all places? If that is what we want, then listen to God. It is like God telling us and all people draw near, sit down, be quiet, and listen up. Things are not the way they are supposed to be and I am going to show you the way back. I am going to bless you. Through your nearness to me, I am going to consecrate you and make you holy.

David spoke of being blessed in our Psalm today. He tells us that when he called out to God, when he relied on God, when he was close to God, he was strengthened. He says that when the kings of the earth, when the powers of the earth, hear the teachings of God, when they really hear the word that comes from God, they will be made holy and they will give God praise.

Paul tells the church in Rome that, if they want to be able to know the will of God for their lives, if they want to be made holy by God, then they need to each be transformed through humility. They need to have renewed minds, not just open to God but opened by God, so that they can discern God's will instead of theirs and then come together, united in one body and with one mission in Christ. It is like Paul giving the Church in Rome their mission statement. A

mission to “Draw near to God, to make and equip disciples and the live as faithful followers of Christ.” Huh? That one sounds kinda familiar, or at least it should.

And finally, back to Peter. Peter, the blessed. Peter, the blessed not because he was the smartest, or the wittiest, or the prettiest, or the richest, or the most powerful. Peter, the blessed because he was willing to get close enough to God, and quiet himself enough, and listen carefully enough in order to receive God’s revealing that the man in front of him was not John the Baptist returned, and was not Elijah or Jeremiah or any of the prophets, and was not just a talented teacher with some marketable ideas that made people feel better about themselves. The man in front of him was the promised Messiah, the Son of the Living God, who came not to be a successful general, but instead to sacrificially pay the price for humanity in order to show them the path back to God. Peter, the blessed. Who received God’s revelation and proclaimed it on behalf of the world. He is so us...if we choose to be so blessed...so consecrated... so made holy.

In just a moment, we are going to see that in action. Lisa gets to speak. Jesus will stand in front of her in the form of the church and she will be asked who Jesus is during her baptism this morning. She will be asked to draw near to God and to listen to his word for the world and for her personally. And then she will be asked to proclaim Christ as her Savior, to die to self, and then to rise in new life with a new mission. The word “blessed” will take on a whole new meaning for her. It will not be just something you say while someone is wiping their nose. It will be transformative, humbling, and proclaiming. We will watch another child of God say to Jesus, “You are the Messiah. The Son of the Living God.”

And it is not going to stop there. It is not going to stop there because Jesus will be standing in front of us, also. He will be standing in front of us and asking each of us, again, individually, as we renew our baptismal vows, who do we say, who do you say that I am on this day, in this park, in front of these people. And at the same moment, God, his Father, will be whispering again quietly into each of our ears a message of blessing.

And then, listen to the words that will be spoken to your heart by Jesus himself. Blessed are you...and you...and you, and blessed are all the rest of us. For flesh and blood did not reveal, nor continues to reveal, this truth to you, but rather it is our Father in Heaven. And on each of us, now with Lisa soon to be at our side, God will continue to build his church for the sake of the world.

Draw near and listen to God, and be blessed.

Amen