

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: Our series of Online Worship
Sermon: Find Your Blessings

Psalm 1

Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,

2

but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

3

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.

4

Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

5

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

6

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Sermon

This is an ancient Chinese story: A farmer had one old horse that he used for tilling his fields. One day the horse escaped into the hills so now the farmer was left to do everything by hand. When all the farmer's friends heard about it, they sympathized with the old man over his bad luck. "Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?", said the farmer. A week later, the horse returned with a herd of wild horses from the hills. This time, the neighbors congratulated the farmer on his good luck. "Good luck, Bad luck, who knows?", said the farmer. Then, when the farmer's son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses, he fell off its back and broke his leg. Everyone agreed that this was very bad luck indeed. Not the farmer, who replied, "Bad luck, good luck, who knows?". Some weeks later, the army marched into the village and forced every able-bodied young man to go fight in a bloody war. When they saw that the farmer's son had a broken leg, they let him stay. Everyone was very happy at the farmer's good luck. "Good luck, bad luck, who knows."

I am often amazed about the good luck bad luck that we find in our lives. Many times, we find bad luck followed by bad luck followed by bad luck, only to have it turn out good in the end. I talk to couples who wish to marry - who have come from bad marriages before, but those experiences have made them prepared to be together for a life of happiness. I've seen college students pick wrong majors after wrong majors, eventually finding the right place in the word because of those bad experiences. We all know people who, in our opinion, are doing wrong things or making bad choices. And sometimes we can only hope that some good can come of it. I am a firm believer that God can help us bring out the good in all things. Blessings in disguise. No matter

what we go through, intrinsically, I believe there is some potential for goodness. It is that potential for goodness that I call blessings.

We all know what blessings are. They are the good luck we receive throughout life. Happiness is a blessing. Health is a blessing. Good friends, good families are a blessing. Having a job is both a blessing and a curse. Children are a blessing - most days. Blessings, according to the dictionary, are good fortunes, luck, anything that brings about a positive change to a situation can be a blessing. When we wish blessings upon someone, we hope that their condition improves. Their life is enhanced, good things might come. In the olden days, when a sneeze what thought to be an evil spirit or at least an unwanted experience, the phrase, "God bless you" came into being, wishing the sneezer a change for the better.

Our Psalm begins its first phrase with the word, "Blessed". It's the very first psalm, so the whole book of psalms begins with the premise of being blessed. And it sets the tone for the rest of the book. Blessed are those who follow God. Folly to those who do not. Folly, I think, is the opposite of blessing. Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditates day and night. And we hear imagery of blessings and prosperity. The wicked are in the folly camp, and they receive judgement and in the end, perish. As I read this, I understand it to be along the lines of "you reap what you sow." Those who put themselves into a position of being blessed are blessed. Those who do not put themselves into a position of being blessed, are not. I had a guy once in my office who was going through some bad times. He had no faith in God, and was living a lifestyle contrary to any semblance of Christian living. And bad things kept on coming to him. This after this after this. His spirit was down, his attitude was down, depression was setting in. He asked me to talk with him awhile. He thought I was pretty with it and had good things going. Why did bad things always happen to him and not to anyone else, he asked. Why couldn't he find happiness? I shared with him my beliefs about faith and hope and blessings (finding the good in anything), having a positive and upbeat attitude. And he said, I'll never forget this, he said, "I can't believe you believe all that garbage, you are such a fool." The only response I could think to say was "maybe so, maybe so. But I'm not the one messed up." Not the most pastoral advice, but I think it is a general truth. If you put yourself in a position to find blessings, you will find them. If you live your life in total disregard and contempt for others or to God, that's what you're going to find. Contempt and folly. Now we have exceptions. You know good people who can't get a break, and you know bad people who have it made - but these are small exceptions. For the most part, the happy people I know find it in the small blessings that life gives. The sad people cannot see the blessings that are all around them.

I thought of other blessings as well. We say a blessing before the meal. We bless each other. Stephanie had a Catholic grandmother who had the priest bless everything in her house. Everything. From the bathroom sink to an eggbeater. Everything was blessed. Now, let's spend a moment on this concept - I think it is poorly understood. Is it possible for something to be blessed? Many summers ago, I went to San Jose to see a cousin of mine - he and his wife just bought a home. And they wanted me to bless it. I've never blessed anything before, unless you consider baptism or a meal. I wasn't sure what to do. It was that preparation for a house blessing that I discovered most of these thoughts on blessings. Like I said before, a blessing is seeing the goodness in any situation. I blessed the house. Now, did that house change? Did something supernatural happen, or was the spiritual essence of the timbers and drywall affected? I don't think so. It was still the same house as before. But, and this is a big but, But their perception of the home had changed. To them, it was transformed from a house into a home - where the presence of God was evident. It became sacred ground because they could see the goodness that was already there. They became aware of the holy in that place - the holy that was already there. But they could now see it. That's what a blessing does - it makes us aware of the sacred already present. And like I said, sometimes blessings come in ways we least expect it.

I remember when my father turned 49. Kinda scary, I'm only 2-3 years out from that age.. He went through a small period of time when he felt some pains in his chest, having a harder time breathing, and walking became a

chore for him. Upon visiting the doctor, he was told that he had severe blockage in the heart that required immediate surgery. He was scheduled for a quadruple by-pass surgery later in the week. He had every right to be angry and scared and frustrated with God. Suffering brings out those feelings of questioning and probably bitterness. He made it through the surgery fine. There was one small complication. He had a blood clot in his leg from where they had the hole from the catheter. The blood clot passed through both of his heart and lungs. It was a miracle that he survived. Again, he had every right to be angry and frustrated and bitter with God. He had another surgery, this time to put in a filter by his heart to protect it from other clots. He made it through the surgery fine. The doctors wanted to run other tests, trying to figure out why the blood clot formed in the first place. They gave him a full body scan. When the scan came back, it revealed a dark spot on one of his kidneys. Another test showed it to be cancerous. He had to have another surgery to remove the kidney. Come to find out, without the quadruple by-pass, and without the blood clot, they would have never found the kidney cancer in time. The doctor said that he probably would have been dead within a year if it wasn't for his health problems. Bad luck, good luck, who knows? Blessings are the goodness that can come from any situation.

I know that many of you feel down. This is getting old. But I am also mindful of those who have a real reason to be angry, upset, or scared. Those who are sick, and their families, or those in tenuous financial positions. This week, look for the blessings in your life. If you have few blessings, examine yourself to see if you are putting yourself in a good position to find them. Blessings are available to anyone and everyone - if we can only open our eyes to see them. God bless.