

Sermon – August 2, 2020
“Original Blessing”
Crown of Life Lutheran Church
Pastor Dave Schilling

In Greek mythology, there is a legend about a labyrinth that was inescapable. Those who entered the labyrinth never exited. For within that maze meandered the Minotaur, a fearsome creature that was half man, half bull. Every nine years, the king of Crete demanded that the Athenians send seven boys and seven girls to be sacrificed to the Minotaur. As you might imagine, the Athenians did not take well to this tradition.

On the occasion of the third Minotaur Games, Theseus, the prince of Athens volunteered himself as tribute. When Theseus landed on Crete, the daughter of the Cretan king, Princess Ariadne, fell head over ancient heels in love with him. She knew no one who ventured into the labyrinth had ever found their way out, so she devised a crafty plan. Ariadne gave Theseus a sword to slay the Minotaur and, more importantly, a ball of thread.

Theseus tied one end to the entrance, then he unwound the ball of thread as he meandered through the maze. After successfully slaying the Minotaur, Theseus walked his way out of the labyrinth with the help of Ariadne’s thread.

Life is very much like a giant labyrinth. It’s full of relational twists and occupational turns we do not see coming. We zig through big decisions, we zag through poor choices. There are situations we get ourselves into that we don’t know how to get ourselves out of. And we all encounter some Minotaurs along the way.

Weaving your way through difficult seasons of life can feel like you’re lost in a labyrinth. I suspect addiction, depression, and grief all feel this way.

But I want you to know today ... there is a way out. There is a ball of thread. But we have got to go all the way back to the beginning to help us find our way forward. What I want to do today is a little reverse engineering. We are going to start with Genesis 1:26...

“Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...” Genesis 1:26

Notice the plural pronoun—let *US* make man in *OUR* image. This is a collaboration between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Then, in verse 27...

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

There is a double emphasis on the image of God because this is double trouble, if you DON’T understand *WHOSE* image you are created in. We have a core value as believers:
EVERYONE IS INVALUABLE AND IRREPLACEABLE.

That value traces back to this ancient truth, to this fundamental fact ... *you are the IMAGE of Almighty God.* Nothing less. Nothing else.

And let me add this ... we all know people that we just don't like. How do you love people you don't like? How do you love people who don't LOOK like us, people who don't SEE eye to eye with us, people who are DIFFERENT than us?
How do you love them?

You love them by REMEMBERING, they were created in the image of God. We live in such a divisive culture and time. And it is essential that we DO NOT forget this fundamental fact ... you are the image of God.

You may not *like* someone, but you're called to love God's LIKENESS in them. And that has nothing to do with political affiliation or socio-economic status or racial identity.

This brings me to Genesis 1:28...

We are only twenty-eight verses into the Bible. And from a human perspective, we are still at the hospital. In fact, we are in the delivery room. The umbilical cord hasn't even been cut.

And what does God do? What is the very FIRST THING God does?

"God BLESSED them..."

I'll stop right there, mid-sentence. I really want you to hear what I'm about to say ... BEFORE original sin, there WAS original blessing ... BEFORE original sin, there WAS original blessing.

That sequence is incredibly significant. It alters the way we relate to God. If we get that sequence wrong, it changes who we see when we look in the mirror.

Because if we doubt original blessing, we second-guess the goodness of God, and then we may relate to God for all the wrong reasons.

This series is about rediscovering God's heart toward you.

- Blessing is God's most ancient instinct.
- Blessing is God's first and foremost reflex.
- Blessing is God's default setting.

Now, we know, God won't bless disobedience. He won't bless pride or greed or laziness. He loves us too much to do that.

We've got to position ourselves for blessing, and we'll talk about some of the habits of highly blessed people. But of this I'm sure ... God wants to bless you beyond your ability to ask or imagine.

I know some have a really hard time believing that, and I'll tell you why. If you feel cursed rather than blessed by your family of origin, it can be really hard to conceive of a good God whose deepest desire is to bless you. If that's true in your life, I want you to know ... God has blessings in categories you cannot even conceive of. He can break the curse and bestow the blessing. You might wonder why I am making such a big deal about original blessing.

In Aristotelian philosophy, there is something called a first principle. It's a basic assumption or foundational truth. Aristotle said a first principle is "the first basis from which a thing is known." Reasoning from first principles is how you break down complicated problems, how you come up with innovative solutions.

Now, let's double back to the beginning. You have got to tie one end of Ariadne's Thread to original blessing. Blessing would be our earliest memory as a human race.

A psychologist (Alfred Adler) is famous for beginning his counseling sessions by asking all new clients the same question: "What is your earliest memory?" No matter how his patients replied, the psychologist would respond: "And so life is."

The psychologist believed that our earliest memories leave a profound imprint on the soul. Now imagine the psychologist ASKING Adam that question.

Adam would have lots of unforgettable moments and memories from roaming the garden to naming the animals to rib surgery. But none of those represent his earliest memory. Adam would say to the psychologist, "My first memory is being blessed by God."

Blessing sets the tone of Adam's entire existence. Yes, sin enters the equation since all of our pain, dysfunction, and imperfections come into play. But none of that changes the fact that we are the image of God Almighty, that we are blessed by God Himself.

Blessing is our earliest memory, and that's why, blessing is our deepest longing. There is a longing within each of us to be blessed - to be CELEBRATED and ACCEPTED for who we are, to be LOVED with no agenda, no strings attached, no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

You are loved *AS IS* .

You are loved not because of anything you've done or not done.
You are loved because of who you are and *whose you are* .

You are the image of Almighty God.

We should recognize that so many of our emotional issues ... greed, lust, anger, pride ... come from a place of woundedness. And they are things that only God's blessing can heal and make whole.

The blessing of God is not easy to quantify or qualify. It is tangible and intangible, timely and timeless all at the same time. It is universally offered to everyone, yet, the blessing of God is as unique as your fingerprint.

Some blessings are as simple and straightforward as a beautiful sunrise. Others are more difficult to discern, like the blessing of brokenness. But of this I am certain ...

the blessing of God is the SOLUTION to your biggest problem, the ANSWER to your boldest prayer, and
the FULFILLMENT of your biggest dreams .

For a moment, let's make this personal ... it is impossible for me to not love my kids. And it doesn't depend on the day of the week, or how they're doing, or contingent upon their accomplishments.

And it's not compromised by the mistakes they make. There is nothing that can change my default setting ... I love my kids !

And here's the amazing thing ... the way we love our children as earthly fathers and mothers doesn't even begin to compare to the God who loves us more than we could ask or imagine.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul said it this way...

"I am convinced that neither death nor life ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, "These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

1 Corinthians 13:13

In other words, love is the first principle. Love is our default setting. Now, I Let me take a few moments to talk about what the blessing IS and IS NOT. First, ...

1. Blessing is not good luck

It's not a good luck charm. It's not winning the lottery! God doesn't bless us to raise our standard of living ... instead God blesses us to raise our standard of giving. If all we do is raise our standard of living, the blessing will become a curse. Our greatest asset will become our greatest liability if we don't use it for God's glory. Secondly, ...

2. Blessing is not health or wealth

Now, these things can be byproducts of God's blessing, but we devalue the blessing of God when we think of the blessing in material terms.

Blessing is joy unspeakable.

It's peace that passes all understanding.

It's knowing that your past mistakes do not define you because your sin is forgiven and forgotten.

Blessing is NOT knowing what your future holds, but KNOWING WHO holds your future.

Simply put, BLESSING IS a right relationship with the God whose image we are created in. It is God with us, God for us, God in us.

Now, the third attribute of BLESSING is...

3. Blessing is not problem free

Jesus even tells us, "In this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33) It is guaranteed. Everyone walks through the valley of the shadow of death.

You will grieve. And the more you love, the more it hurts. You will be mistreated and misunderstood. Life is not fair, but God is, and God is good all the time. His grace IS sufficient.

Carl Jung made a striking observation about how people are and are not healed. He said, "All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble." Well, that's depressing. If there is no solution to the problem, what's the point? But he doesn't stop there. He says, "They can never be solved, they can only be outgrown." That is so good, and so hard at the same time.

The circumstances you want God to change may be the circumstances God is using to CHANGE you. What you perceive to be a curse may turn out to be a blessing in disguise because it's the catalyst for spiritual and emotional and relational growth. Sometimes you have to hit bottom in order to bounce back up.

Now one final observation

4. The blessings of God will complicate your life

The reward for good work in the parable of the talents was not an early retirement or extended vacation. The reward for good work was MORE work.

Sin will obviously complicate your life in ways it SHOULD NOT be complicated.

While blessing will complicate your life in ways it SHOULD BE complicated.

You need to build relationships with people who aren't like you? Because it will complicate your life and allow you to grow.

You need to volunteer in the community? Because it will complicate your calendar and budget.

It is why you need to plug into a ministry. It will complicate your life on Sunday mornings and during the week.

But those complications are catalysts for growth. Those complications are the byproduct of blessing.

Now, let me close with this.

At the end of his earthly life, Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. It was a celebration of Israel's exodus out of Egypt. It was a sacred celebration, an annual holiday.

But Jesus redefined what it meant. He took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it. Then he said to the disciples, "This is my body." In the same way, after Supper, he took the cup and said, "This cup is the new testament of my blood."

They wouldn't really understand what that meant until 24 hours later. That same night, Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples for thirty pieces of silver. They were probably sanctuary shekels, since Judas was paid by the high priest.

In today's currency, those shekels were worth about 72 cents each. Judas betrayed Jesus for as little as \$21.60.

Translation ... Jesus was worth \$21.60 to Judas. When we flip that coin, Judas was worth the cross to Jesus. That's the value Jesus places on you and me. Even if we sell Him out for \$21.60, you are worth the cross to Christ.

The cross is where the curse of sin is broken. The cross is where every blessing is bestowed.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul calls the communion cup, *the cup of blessing*.

If one end of Ariadne's thread is tied to original blessing, I think the other end is tied to the communion cup ... the cup of blessing.

Let's you and I hang on to that thread as if our lives depended on it ... for you see, our eternal lives DO depend on it. Amen