

Sermon
14 October 2018
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Reading: Numbers 6:22-27

Luke 18:15-17

(Baptism: West Kirk)

What is a blessing? It's a promise that God loves you and will be with you.

To me, a blessing is almost like a hug from God, it's the reassurance that no matter what I am going through, I won't have to go through it alone...

It's like being handed a raincoat on a rainy day. It's not going to make the rain stop, but it will keep you dry.

We went to the Farmer's Market in Balerno yesterday, in the pouring rain. I had my proper waterproof jacket on, André only wore a light, shower resistant jacket. And as you all know my dear husband – he spoke to EVERYBODY, so by the time we got home again and took our soaking jackets off – I was dry, but André's shirt was soaked through, he was wet to the skin...

So that's how we've learned the difference between *waterproof* and *shower resistant!*

To go through life with the blessing of God, is like walking in the rain with a proper waterproof jacket on – it doesn't let the difficulties of life that so often rain down on us, get under our skins.

In Numbers 6 we find the priestly blessing, the words God gave Aaron to bless the Israelites with:

The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you

The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Beautiful, meaningful words, - even written in a meaningful way. Now in our English translation we can't see this, but in the original Hebrew the Old Testament was written in, these 3 lines contain 3, 5 and 7 words each - 15 words altogether. Each line contains the name of God, which, if you take these away, leaves 12 words in total.

To say something 3 times in those days, was a confirmation that it was true, so by saying the name of God 3 times was a reminder that this blessing came from God himself. The remaining 12 words referred to the 12 tribes of Israel.

In other words, God *himself* was blessing the 12 tribes of Israel – *everybody* who belonged to him. Can you see how this blessing would flow over people? Not only in meaning, but also in the way it was said?

So from the very beginning it was important to God to bless his children. This is reinforced by the wee story we read from Luke 18, where Jesus blessed the little children.

In New Testament times the Jews would take their children to the temple to be blessed once a week, praying that they would grow up strong and brave and loving, and that they would always talk and listen to God.

And I'm sure you can imagine how many parents desperately wanted Jesus himself to bless their kids in this way.

But in that society, everybody had a place. Boys went to the temple with their dads to study the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, and girls stayed at home to learn from their mums.

Once a boy was 13 years old, he reached adulthood, and he was allowed to speak in public; something girls were never allowed to do.

Because Luke here uses the word "little children" or "babies", we know it must have been their mums who brought them to Jesus. So they were crossing a social boundary. Mums and babies were always supposed to stay at home.

So although we can easily judge the disciples harshly for not wanting these mums to bring their wee ones to Jesus, the disciples were just doing what was socially acceptable in those days.

Women and young children had no place in the public sphere.

Apart from that – Jesus was busy with very important work. He was on his way to Jerusalem to die on a cross, but before he got there he had to teach the people how God expected them to live. He didn't have a minute to waste.

Now I don't know if any of you have ever tried working a home with toddlers under your feet – it's almost better not to even try! You type one sentence on your computer and then this little voice calls you:

“Mummy... I'm hungry; Daddy, come play with me; Mummy, I've made a mess!”

Parents can so easily get tired and worn out by the relentless demands of their kids, but not Jesus.

Jesus couldn't care less about the rules and regulations of society, he didn't mind at all being interrupted during his important work by children. For him, love was more important than anything else. In fact, he just used this whole incident as a teaching opportunity.

He explained to his disciples (and to us), that if anyone wanted to receive the kingdom of God, they had to be like a little child.

All the important people standing around Jesus would find this statement very insulting, because in their social hierarchy children were right at the very bottom.

But that was Jesus' point exactly!

Little children don't think that they are important! They are innocent, they trust their parents wholeheartedly, they don't question everything, and they love unconditionally.

If we could just all be like that, we would understand exactly what it means to be a part of the kingdom of God!

One thing kids can do very well is accept gifts! They just grab it, rip the paper off and straight away start playing with their new toy.

They don't wonder about the intention of the donor, they don't try to figure out if there is a hidden meaning behind the gift, they don't put it away to play with later or even hide it away because it's not really their taste. All the things we grown-ups so often do...

God's blessing to us is a gift. We haven't done anything to deserve it, and we should accept it, and embrace it, and use it to help us live our lives in confidence, because we know we are not doing it alone.

When we were in South Africa this summer, André baptised his 2 nephews. He baptised the baby first, and when it came to the 4-year-old, André lifted him up, baptised him, and when he held his hand out over him for the blessing, the wee boy gave André a high five!

Everybody giggled, but I thought that little man had the right idea – if God blesses you, you react on it!

So let's do the same.

Let's walk out these doors today and go live like God's children. Loved and accepted; treasured and special.

(....., today God blessed, he set her up for a life filled with good things and love. Tell her about today. Remind her, and, about the raincoats they've been given by God; remind them that they will always be protected against the downpours of difficulties that so often form a part of life. And do this not only through your words, but through your example too.)

May God bless you all, in abundance.

Amen