

**Yr. C, Wednesday 4 in Lent—Bless
April 3, 2019
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
739 Words**

**Lessons: Zephaniah 3:12-20
 Psalm 96:1-9
 John 4:19-26**

The prophet, Ezekiel, shares the word of the Lord to the wayward and the lost. “I will gather you. I will bring you home. I will cleanse you.” And then, this unimaginably radical promise: “I will give you a heart transplant. I will give you a spirit transplant. With me, you can expect a brand new, better life. You will be my people. I will be your God.”

How do *you* respond to a promise like that? How do *we* respond to a gift like that? I’ll tell you how. It’s the way we respond at the culmination of our worship. “Let us bless the Lord! Thanks be to God.”

When we count our blessings—which is a spiritual discipline—there is a multiplier effect. The genuinely, unfeignedly thankful person *wants to bless God*...by blessing other people.

When we follow the way of love, turning toward Jesus naturally leads us to want to learn from Jesus. And learning from Jesus leads us to want to pray—responding to God in thought, word, deed, and silence through Jesus’ Name. Praying in Jesus’ Name naturally leads us to gather with others for worship in his Name. And this worship—corporately thanking, praising and dwelling with God—naturally renews us to go forth and become a little bit more of the blessing we have received.

Blessing simply means sharing your gifts with others, because gifts are meant to be shared.

To bless is to give and to serve unselfishly, like God did for the Children of Israel. Remember the gifts our Lord promised according to Ezekiel: “I will gather you. I will bring you home. I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you. A new spirit I will put within you.” The Children of Israel were blessed in order to become *more*...of a blessing.

Remember also the gifts Jesus gave and served so unselfishly—his healing, nourishing, forgiving faith, hope and love. By him and with him and in him, we have been blessed...in order to become *more*...of a blessing.

Mary, his mother, put it best in the song we just sang altogether: “My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my savior; for he has looked with favor upon his lowly servant. All generations will call me blessed.”

The reason all generations have called her the blessed Mother is because she because she received the gift of Jesus Christ, and—in turn—she shared him with the whole world. She was blessed...in order to become *more*...of a blessing.

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St. Paul grasped the promise of God described by Ezekiel—a heart transplant and a spirit transplant. We heard this lesson on Sunday, and it was simply too perfect not to share it again tonight. Of all people, Paul knew what a conversion was. After all, he became a new creation on the road to Damascus. Paul was transformed from ‘fighter’ to ‘lover,’ from ‘enforcer of rules’ to ‘giver of gifts.’ Paul was mercifully blessed, and he became *more*...of a blessing.

The crux of the matter is this. As St. Paul explained, God blessed sinners in order that sinners might become nothing less than the righteousness of God. In other words, God blesses sinners so that they might become *more...of a blessing*.

One of the gifts of Evensong is that we get to celebrate the beauty of Mary's song about becoming a blessing to all generations.

We also get to sing the Song of Simeon, who also received the blessing of the Christ Child in his arms. Simeon received this blessing and experienced the peace that surpasses all understanding...the peace of a new heart and a new spirit illuminated with the light of Christ. This light is intended by God to enlighten all nations, and—like Mary and like Simeon—we are invited to carry it and share it.

In these waning days of Lent, consider your gifts—the blessings you have received which you can unselfishly share with others in Christ's name. Like Ezekiel and Paul, Mary and Simeon, we have been blessed by God in order to become *more...of a blessing* to others. And this is how we fulfill the invitation at the culmination of our worship—the invitation to live more nearly as we pray.

The simple invitation is this: Let us bless the Lord!

Thanks be to God. Amen.