

Count Your Blessings

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Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 0 0] Thank you.

Amen. Amen.

Good morning, church. May the grace and peace of the risen Christ be with you. It is always a joy to be able to come together and worship God as God's people.

Amen. When the body of Christ comes together, a mighty thing happens. And welcome to those of you who are joining us online, as well as everyone who has gathered in the sanctuary with us this morning. This is Pendleton Center, United Methodist Church, and we are excited to be able to serve God together with you.

And so this morning, our thought is about counting your blessings. And so let that marinate with you as you take a minute and share that blessing with everyone around you. Share that peace of Christ. Make sure everyone knows as we are aware of the grace and peace of God today.

[2 : 2 1] So as we take a moment and focus in on the presence and movement of God around us, let's enter into a state of prayer doing this responsive reading as our call to worship. When you say, blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Do your eyes rest on me in the crowd and see how I am weighed down with possessions. Lord, will you understand the crown of my blessings. When you say, blessed are you who are hungry, for you will be filled.

Do you place your hand in mine and know the feast that I have eaten? Lord, will you understand the crown of my blessings. When you say, blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Do you anoint my head with oil and sense that I have labored long and hard? Lord, will you understand the crown of my blessings.

Then bless me again, Lord. Take my riches, my fullness, my laughter, all that I have in excess, and let it rise up in the poor, the hungry, and those who weep.

[3 : 3 2] That we may delight in good things, share bread and wine together, open our hearts in joy and sorrow, knowing that together we seek your kingdom as one body.

Lord, will you help me understand the crown of my blessings. Amen. Amen. Amen. Good morning, everybody.

Good morning to everybody online. I'm going to count my blessings this morning that when I ask you to rise, I can see all your faces and probably hear your voices a whole lot better. I'm going to invite you to stand as we sing our first hymn, Be Thou My Vision.

Be Thou My Vision, O Lord of my heart, Not be all else to receive that Thou art. Thou my blessed heart, my day, or my mind, Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, Not be all else to receive that Thou art. Thou my blessed heart, Thou my heart, Thou my blessed heart, My day, or my night.

[4 : 58] Waiting, O sleeping, O Lord of my heart, Waiting, O sleeping, O Lord of my heart, My presence, my light. Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word.

I am ever with Thee, and Thou with me, Lord. Thou and Thou only, first in my heart.

Great God of heaven, my treasured Thou art. Great God of heaven, my victory won.

May I rejoice, O bright and sun. Heart of my own heart, whatever befall.

Still be my vision, O ruler of all. You may be seated.

[6 : 29] Good morning. How are you today? God's blessings rain down on us like manna from heaven.

Sometimes we recognize them as blessings, and sometimes we don't. But God's presence is with us in either case. Today we pause on our journey to remember the many times God has been with us along the way, and has provided for our needs.

Then through the ministry of this church, we join in the work of God in providing the needs of the world. Let us gather our gifts together, and offer them to God in gratitude and praise.

to instruct E61 through the Spirit and great Sands of yah. Whether we serve you today or pleasure in ministry, to practice the Lord of all humbling and joy. And in this way, we would grant men. Thank you.

Thank you.

[8 : 13] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[11 : 07] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. With children The deadly fight shall rise To meet him in the air And then those that remain Shall meet with me change At the midnight cry When Jesus comes again And then those that remain Shall be quick to change At the midnight cry

When Jesus comes again When Jesus comes again When Jesus comes again Comes again When Jesus comes again When Jesus comes again Praise God Praise God For the best is found Praise Him Of priests to see the light

Praise Him Of the heavenly host Praise God Praise God And the heavenly host On the other God Everything we have And everything we are Comes from you And we thank you for the opportunity To give some of what you've given us back Please use this to do your work in the world In your name we pray Amen You may be seated So in our time of prayers And celebrations We want to continue to keep Pastor Kathy Who is ending her time of rest In our thoughts and prayers So please pray with me Compassionate Lord

Compassionate Lord You blessed the poor And healed those left To beg for their livelihoods And yet we're still surrounded By poverty And financial difficulties Support those who face struggles at work Or for whom employment Or income is uncertain Help us provide for those Who beg for their livelihoods today That they may be cared for Abundant God Abundant God You blessed the hungry And fed thousands But famine is still a problem in our world Starvation is used as a weapon of war And claims the lives of many thousands of children In conflict zones Be with those seeking peace Or delivering aid to the millions Facing starvation today Comforting Lord You blessed those who wept And consoled those who grieve Be with those who have lost family and friends Be with us here today

[15 : 26] When we face loss and disappointment All embracing God You've blessed the broken and the lonely And you've brought them into the circle of your love You welcomed the excluded And you made time for those whom others told you to ignore Bless us today That when we are broken and lonely You're there with us Bring us into your family of love And prompt us to share your love with those around us Welcoming, including, and noticing others' needs Deliver and heal your children, loving God In Jesus' name we pray Amen Amen Good morning.

Today's scripture is from the book of Luke, chapter 6, verses 17 through 23. Jesus went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there, and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and be healed of their diseases.

Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

Looking at his disciples, he said, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you, and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man.

[17 : 43] So this is how their ancestors treated their prophets. this is the word of the Lord thanks be to God friends would you join me in a word of prayer please loving and gracious God we give you thanks for this time for this moment we are able to come together having had our spirits lifted by the reading of your word and the singing of sacred songs and connecting to you in prayer Lord we are open to your movement and your presence among us so Lord now in this time please plant that seed in us you know we need let that seed grow and let it bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray

Amen so how many of you count your blessings that was a real question how many of you count your blessings okay so saw a few hands go up that's a good thing and they're at least aware of counting your blessings and so let's take a minute now I'm going to give you a few seconds here I want you to actually spend a minute and count your blessings okay just a few seconds think through it count your blessings okay I see some wheels turning a little smoke rising in the back that's okay all right well that's good that's good okay hopefully I was still my voice is interrupting a list still in progress but it's an important thing to spend some time being aware of the ways in which we are blessed by God and that's what we're doing we're taking a pause here to acknowledge that God works in our lives now as you think about this idea of counting your blessings when that list hit your mind when you started to run down it

I'm curious and you don't have to answer this out loud but I'm curious as to what was on it hopefully there was some people on it and hopefully you are aware of the good things God has done for you and at least maybe last on your list was kind of your roster of things because sometimes people's brains go to those things a little too quickly and aren't aware so much of the love that they have in their lives from so many people or the ways in which God has touched them or done some extraordinary things for them and all of a sudden we start to start counting up the toys a little too quickly now don't get me wrong when you know you've been blessed by God that's an important thing and sometimes those material blessings are important but let's hope that your understanding of what it means to have been blessed is not limited to your list of cool new things because that's a pretty dangerous trap to fall into people have done that throughout history and it can be a really strange way to understand God because if for you

God is only the provider of toys then your relationship with God goes into some very strange places for example when you haven't had a new toy for a while or you may have been in an environment raised in an environment where you didn't have a lot of material resources and you kind of took that to believe that maybe God didn't see you or didn't hear you or didn't care about you very much or you take that and then you transfer it on to well because I do have these things maybe God likes me better than some folks who don't have these things and that's not really how it works and it's really important that we don't fall into that trap when we are aware of that because we hear that phrase a lot it says count your blessings and some of us probably use that phrase but we don't want that to turn into what we were just talking about right that sense of well look at my list and then you get to walk around showing people your list and implying some things by what's on your list so then if we do have this notion of counting our blessings because counting our blessings isn't inherently bad because being aware of how we have been touched by God being aware of the ways God has worked in our lives is important you know we've seen a shift in culture a little while ago because folks started recommending this idea of maybe keeping a little gratitude journal before you go to bed and these sorts of things to help you not get lost in all the despair and hopelessness that we see in the world if you can think of one or two good things that have happened over the course of a day or one or two good things you know are in your life it kind of keeps your perspective right okay that's fine but again we run the risk of falling into list thinking so where do we get this right how do we not get this into the falling into the God as Santa trap and remember that God is about a whole lot more than just simply stacking stuff in our lives well we have to remember something really important and that's part of what we hear in Jesus' message today when we encounter Jesus today he's been in his public ministry for a bit he's just come off of naming the twelve and he comes down literally from a mountain with them and he starts teaching now this is Luke's rendering of this big sermon and biblical scholars put this in a couple of different places because Luke puts it in a different place than Matthew does and Matthew's is a lot longer and more comprehensive than Luke's is some folks think that's because Luke was writing to a different audience and so there were some things that Matthew talked about that Luke's audience wouldn't have understood and also let's remember that Matthew and Luke have different points to make in their gospels nevertheless they both hit this important teaching of Jesus and this teaching tells us that in a lot of ways we've got this whole thing about being blessed wrong and he was saying it to an audience of course in that time period but the theme stays with us

and the lesson is no less important so what are we hearing from Jesus so let's hear it again like I said Luke's version of the Beatitudes is shorter but let's hear it again blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God blessed are you who hunger now for you shall be filled blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and cast out your name as evil for the son of man's sake rejoice in that day and leap for joy for indeed your reward is great in heaven for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets that sounds probably like a very different list than most of us were just running through in our heads so what is Jesus talking about is Jesus really saying that being poor is a good thing we don't want to go there with it but if we want to get at what Jesus is trying to teach it might be helpful to hear a different translation of that passage

[27 : 01] I was just reading from what's called a new King James and I want to read the same passage in a translation that's called the message now Eugene Peterson did something a little different here he sort of put his own spin on the original manuscripts and so it's not really meant to be a word for word translation he's trying to say what Jesus said in contemporary language so it sounds a little more easy for someone in the 21st century United States to hear it the way we would say it if we were saying it to ourselves if we were saying it to like our friends so hear it in this voice you're blessed when you've lost it all God's kingdom is there for the finding you're blessed when you're ravenously hungry because then you're ready for the messianic meal you're blessed when the tears flow freely because joy comes in the morning count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down and throws you out every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me what it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable you can be glad when that happens skip like a lamb if you like for even though they don't like it

I do and all of heaven applauds and know that you are in good company my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this it's a real different spin it lands kind of differently on the heart and the ear when you hear it that way so let's get to what it means to count your blessings from that point of view right because Jesus isn't so much celebrating poverty what he is saying is that to a group of people who have been told by the world that you don't matter very much to a group of people who looks out into the world and sees a whole lot of people with things that they don't have largely largely from some things that probably have nothing to do with their own efforts or abilities but that being said they look out and they see a world that feels very very unfair and what God is telling them is first

I see you the world may not see you but I see you and even if it feels hard right now and even if it feels unfair right now trust me I will make this right for you now that doesn't mean poof and everybody's going to be okay what it does mean is that God is at work in their lives every bit as much as God is at work in ours and there's a deeper lesson because when you hear that idea about being hungry when it says then you're ready for the messianic it's setting you up for this idea that says I am here and I will take care of you even if the world does not so what I want you to hear friends is this idea of when need is real when something happens

God is saying look you have an opportunity for me to be exactly who I've always said I was going to be you are in this place where you get to experience me in a way that other people may have forgotten and that friends is really the point because what happens after this passage is Jesus takes it to a different place because after trying to comfort those who are going without what Jesus does is speak to those who have plenty and what he tells them is this it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made what you have is all you'll ever get and it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself yourself will not satisfy you for long and it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games there's suffering to be met and you're going to meet it there's trouble ahead when you only live for the approval of others saying what flatters them what indulges them popularity contests are not truth contests look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors your task is to be true not popular so what's that really about what Jesus is trying to remind us of is that it can be really really dangerous for us sometimes to forget that we are utterly dependent on God completely totally and utterly dependent on God now it's easier to remember that when you find yourself in a circumstance where you know you are dependent in other words it can be something as simple as needing to be in bed sick for a few days and have somebody take care of you it could get much more serious than that some of us grew up in circumstances where we didn't really know where the next meal was coming from some of us may have lived in circumstances where we didn't know how the next bill was going to get paid some of us may have lived in circumstances where things were far more trying than that the thing about those trying circumstances just as you heard Jesus say is you are set up to see God do something that only God can do something that only God can do

God may work through human hands but don't forget it is still God at work our challenge can be is when circumstances are not as challenging when we know we can stay in a nice warm place that we can get into a car and go to another nice warm place we know that there will be food in the fridge and we know that there will be loved ones around when we have those kinds of times it's easy for us to forget what it means to be utterly completely dependent on God because comfort makes it easy for us to forget that we didn't get here by ourselves that doesn't mean you didn't do the work but you didn't get there by yourself and when that happens the question for us becomes where is really your faith where is really your hope on whom are you depending now have you let that go and now you are completely dependent on your own two hands and you're living by the standards of the world and you think that the blessings are that you have this really nice stack of toys or has something happened in your journey where you can still remember that we are utterly completely dependent on the love and the grace of a merciful God to see us through each and every day even when our problems are not urgent problems even when our need is not deep need we are no less dependent upon God because we cannot save ourselves yes we may be able to get up and work yes we may have money in the bank yes we may have those basic needs met but at the end of the day what really matters in life you can't give yourself peace your joy doesn't flow from your own two hands anytime you try that you know it doesn't work that's what

[36 : 20] Jesus is talking about that those things only come from being in right relationship with God and when we talk about being utterly and completely dependent the minute we forget that the minute that fades into the background and that God is just a nice thing we do every so often or God is this little bitty thing we check in with from time to time or God is only that place we go when we got a 911 level emergency in our life then we have forgotten what it means to be blessed by God completely forgotten what it means to be blessed so how do we make sure we don't fall into that trap first thing we have to do is make sure we remember what blessing really is and not limit it to the material to remember not in a way that aggrandizes itself or makes us feel like we're better than other people but remember that God has worked great things in your life and those great things are not just simply what you can walk through your house and point to the fact that you are saved the fact that you are loved in real ways not just in the easy ways the fact that when there was a time when you didn't know how the next thing was going to happen

God made it happen and you're here to tell that story this is blessing and even if your circumstance is difficult which is where Jesus starts even if your circumstance makes you look around the world and say nobody gets it I'm out here on my own I don't know how I'm going to fix this I don't know what I'm going to do God says you are being set up for what's coming next that only I can do open your eyes and your heart and watch me work that doesn't make it feel good but it does give you real hope and you can find real peace so friends our challenge in this is to remember what it means to really count your blessings to really understand your blessings because so often we trivialize it so often we demean it in many ways not so much intentionally but we reduce it to this thing that is not what

Jesus was intending for us at all so remember something remember this and remember it well I was at a training many years ago and the keynote speaker his name was Ray Buckley said something that has always stayed with me and I want you to hear it too Ray closed his speech by saying this we are a blessed people not because we are so good and not because we are so great but because our God is both I want you to hear that again we are a blessed people not because we are so good or we are so great but because our God is both remember that if you have known blessing in your life at all it is because of who your God is count your blessings amen and amen loving and gracious God we give you thanks thanks for the ways in which you move in our lives that go so far beyond what the world teaches us

Lord let us always remember that true blessing flows from being in right relationship with you the things we need most the things we seek most peace love joy flow from you real hope is the product of knowing that we are with you following you and you are at work so Lord yes we appreciate the ways in which you have given gifts we appreciate your presence in moments we appreciate all that you have done but let us never reduce who you are in the ways in which you work in and around and through us to simply being the material things thank you for the gift of your blessing amen grace on the

Amen. Amen.

[43 : 00] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Indeed, one of the ways in which we continue in our worship is to experience the gift of God expressed in Holy Communion.

So let's open our hearts, ready ourselves as we come to the Lord's table. Lord be with you.

And also be with you. Lift up your hearts. Give the love of the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God. It is right to hear our thanks and praise. It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth.

You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

[45 : 29] You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets, who looked for that day when justice would roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

When nation would not lift up to the earth. When nation would not lift up sword against nation, and neither would they study war anymore. And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

Holy, holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you and blessed is your son, Jesus Christ. Hosanna in the highest.

Hosanna in the highest.

[47 : 24] For you. Do this in remembrance of me. And when the supper was over, he took the cup. He gave thanks to you. He gave it to his disciples, and he said, drink from this, all of you.

This is my blood. The sign of the new covenant, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin. Every time that you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

and so in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith Christ has died Christ is risen Christ will come again pour out your holy spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and cup make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood by your spirit make us one with Christ one with each other and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet through your son Jesus Christ with the holy spirit in your holy church all honor and glory is yours almighty God now and forever amen and now let us pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever amen■■■ you

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[51 : 32] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. The Lord has prepared this table and he has opened it to all God's children.

Remember this is not about how worthy you feel, this is about how worthy he is. It is his gift to you to come and partake and all are invited. We ask you to use the center aisle, come to the front, receive your elements and then exit by the sides.

There's a gluten free station on the far side of the sanctuary here. If you would prefer to receive pre-packaged elements, simply ask one of the servers and they will share them with you. But we ask that you receive this because as we have emphasized, this is God's gift for you to receive.

Come now as the spirit moves. Like the spirit moves. . . .

[52 : 42] . . Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[57 : 47] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We come together as a united body to give thanks and to praise and worship a God who is good and great.

And I invite you to stand as we sing the closing song, Shout to the Lord. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. My Savior, my Savior, Lord, it is not like you.

All of my days I want to praise the wonders of your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength Let every breath, all that I am, never cease to worship you Shout to the Lord on the earth, let us be Power and majesty, praise to the King Brought and taught up and conceived the Lord At the sound of your name I sing for joy at the work of your hands Forever I love you, forever I'll stand Nothing compares to the promise I've heard in you

[59 : 45] My Jesus, my Savior, Lord there is none like you All of my days, I want to praise the wonders of your mighty love My comfort, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength Let every breath, all that I am, never cease to worship you Shout to the Lord on the earth, let us sing Power and majesty, praise to the King Mountains bow down and the seas will roar

At the sound of your name I sing for joy at the work of your hands Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand Forever I'll stand Nothing compares to the promise I've heard in you Nothing compares to the promise I've heard in you You are a blessed people A blessed people You are a blessed people Not because you are so good Or you are so great But because our God

Is both Go into the world And share that With a world that is hurting And broken And doesn't understand what it means To truly be blessed by God Now in the name of God our creator and king In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord And our savior And in the name of the Holy Spirit Our comforter And our sustainer May God bless us now As we leave to love and serve God And all God's children Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

Thank you.

Thank you.