

UUCMC Covenant Circle Session

June 2018: Blessing

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

Blessed be the longing that brought you here

And quickens your soul with wonder.

May you have the courage to listen to the voice of desire that disturbs you when you have settled for something safe.

~ John O'Donohue

Reminder of our Covenant

Check-In (3-4 minutes each)

Topic with Readings

Word Root

Blessing has a long history of meanings and roots. The Old English blēdsian based on blōd 'blood' (originally to 'mark or consecrate with blood') was used to translate the Latin benedicere 'to praise or worship.' The meaning shifted in late Old English toward 'pronounce or make happy, prosperous, or fortunate.' In the Semitic language of Aramaic, the phrase translated as 'Blessed' in the Beatitudes was actually tubwayhun which refers to being ripe, mature; having reached a stage of the fullness of the person I am meant to be.

So what, then, does it mean to offer a blessing, to be a blessing? To bless something or someone is to invoke its wholeness, to help remind the person or thing you are blessing of its essence, its sacredness, its beauty, and to help remind yourself of that, too. Blessing does not fix anything. It is not a cure... It does not instill health or well-being or strength. Instead, it reminds us that those things are already there, within us.

~ Rev. Elea Kemler

There is a reality in blessing... It doesn't enhance sacredness, but it acknowledges it.

~ Marilynne Robinson, from Gilead

To bless is to put a bit of yourself into something. ~ Macrina Wiederkehr and Joyce Rupp

To give someone a blessing is the most significant affirmation we can offer. It is more than a word of praise or appreciation; it is more than pointing out someone's talents or good deeds; it is more than putting someone in the light. To give a blessing is to affirm, to say "yes" to a person's Belovedness.

~ Henri J. M. Nouwen

A blessing is not something that one person gives another. A blessing is a moment of meeting, a certain kind of relationship in which both people involved remember and acknowledge their true nature and worth and strengthen what is whole in one another. By making a place for wholeness within our relationships, we offer others the opportunity to be whole without shame and become

a place of refuge from everything in them and around them that is not genuine. We enable people to remember who they are.

~ Rachel Naomi Remen, My Grandfather's Blessings

The one who offers a blessing is like a coach whispering to an athlete before a competition, "You can do it!" More than encouragement, positive spin, or sincere wish, the words of blessing literally bring forth and make real an otherwise unrealizable force. In this way, blessing is not supplication but symbiosis. God needs us to summon blessings, just as we could not live without them.

~ Lawrence Kushner

Where does it come from, this strange unquenchable human urge for 'more' that is both our blessing and our curse? It has caused us to lift our eyes to the heavens and thread together pieces of the universe until we can glimpse a shadow of the divine creation. Yet to gain this knowledge, we have sometimes lost the mystery of a cloud, the beauty of a garden, the joy of a single step. We must learn to value the small as well as the great... Do we really need much more than this? To honor the dawn. To visit a garden. To talk to a friend. To contemplate a cloud. To cherish a meal. To bow our heads before the mystery of the day. Are these not enough?

~ Kent Neburn

We bless the life around us far more than we realize... the unexpected phone call, the brief touch, the willingness to listen generously, the warm smile or wink of recognition. Big messages come in small packages. All it may take to restore someone's trust in life may be returning a lost earring or a dropped glove. A woman once told me that she did not feel the need to reach out to those around her because she prayed every day... But a prayer is about our relationship to God; a blessing is about our relationship to the spark of God in one another. God may not need our attention as badly as the person next to us on the bus or behind us on line in the supermarket.

~Rachel Naomi Remen, My Grandfather's Blessings

It's hardest to love the ordinary things, she said, but you get lots of opportunities to practice.

~ Brian Andreas

Something Wild and Unbroken
(Blessed by surprising beauty)

~ Carrie Newcomer

Full poem here: <http://carriewcomer.tumblr.com/post/122883509259/something-wild-and-unbroken>

“Riding my bike down a narrow country road...
A graceful young doe
Was bounding in beautiful unhurried leaps...
Then with a burst of speed
She dashed in front of me
And disappeared into the woods
Leaving me breathless
With a feeling of visitation...
Since that moment,

The world has felt less weary...”

It could happen any time, tornado,
earthquake, Armageddon. It could happen.
Or sunshine, love, salvation.
It could, you know. That’s why we wake
and look out — no guarantees
in this life.
But some bonuses, like morning,
like right now, like noon,
like evening.
Yes!

~ William Stafford

A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless us with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships
So that we may live from deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God's creations
So that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,
So that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with just enough foolishness
To believe that we can make a difference in the world,
So that we can do what others claim cannot be done:
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and all our neighbors who are poor.

Silent Reflection

Questions to prompt discussion (choose ones that work for you)

As always, don’t treat these questions like “homework” or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the single question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a people of blessing means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains “your work”? Where is that question trying to lead you?

1. Is it time to embrace yourself as a blessing once again? We all forget sometimes. We all let others’ definitions of worth determine how we feel about our own. The work of seeing

ourselves as a blessing is ongoing. How do you need to re-claim or re-name your blessing to the world?

2. What is your very favorite thing to do? When was the last time you did it? Why again aren't you doing it all the time? Or at least much more often?

3. Some say a blessing is anything that helps us remember who we really are. We most often lose ourselves in work or relationships that ask us to be something we're not. Is it time to bless yourself and find yourself by saying goodbye to a job or a relationship that doesn't bless and see you?

4. Has age helped or hurt? At what age were you best at noticing the blessings around you? Have you gotten better as time has gone on? Or worse? What would improve your gaze?

5. Did your words bless or curse others this past week? A Soul Matters facilitator writes, "My Mom often told us to consider our words before offering an opinion. Her mantra was: "Are your words kind and helpful? If both adjectives do not apply, keep the thought to yourself!" What words have fallen from your lips lately that you need to go back and turn into a blessing?

6. Is it time to bless yourself with the foolishness of believing you can do what others say can't be done?

7. Have you thanked all of your "fathers" for their blessings? Many of us have more than one father figure in our lives. When was the last time you told them thanks for their gifts? And let them know you carry them and their influence with you still?

8. In the midst of all the praises for ordinary blessings, is a tiny voice inside you whispering "more!?" Maybe it's ok to ignore a few everyday blessings for a while so you can make that "big blessing" real.

9. Sometimes there aren't blessings hidden in our pain. Sometimes it's not you overlooking the blessings; they simply aren't there. Often we just need space to acknowledge the emptiness, rather than have people try to minimize it, make it go away or convince us we should find a silver lining. Is that the blessing you really need? The blessing of space to do nothing but mourn the loss and feel the pain? What will it take for you to get it?

10. Some blessings are always there; others are fleeting and eventually leave us. Which of your current blessings' time clock is farther along than you wish? What blessing needs noticed before it says goodbye?

11. Are you more often anxious about scarcity than you are stunned by all the undeserved blessings?

12. What was your biggest "unexpected blessing moment"? When did a blessing surprise and sustain you in the midst of pain? What gift or lesson from that story do you need to most remember today?

13. What if you told yourself that this was the best and most blessed part of your life? What might look or feel differently to you?

14. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Housekeeping Details Thank you for another wonderful year of covenant circles! Our regular sessions will resume in the Fall. Perhaps your group would like to schedule a summer gathering to stay connected over the summer? Any feedback or ideas for improvement to our process please send them to Virginia@uucmc.org or Lisa@uucmc.org.

Check-out

Closing Words

Thank you, faithful things! ~ Mark Strand

Thank you, faithful things!

Thank you, world!

To know that the city is still there,
that the woods are still there,
and the houses, and the hum of traffic
and the slow cows grazing in the field;
that the earth continues to turn
and time hasn't stopped,
that we come back whole
to suck the sweet marrow of day,
thank you, bright morning,
thank you, thank you!