

We Bless the Lord

15th Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 19[a]

September 17, 2017

PSALM 103:1-12

¹ **Bless the LORD, O my soul,**

and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

² **Bless the LORD, O my soul,**

and forget not all his benefits,

³ **who forgives all your iniquity,**

who heals all your diseases,

⁴ **who redeems your life from the pit,**

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

⁵ who satisfies you with good

so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶ The LORD works righteousness

and justice for all who are oppressed.

⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,

his acts to the people of Israel.

⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹ He will not always chide,

nor will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

To bless means to bestow what belongs to your name.

To bless is to consign to another by oath and promise all that belongs to your name and which you have to pass on upon your death. To bless is to put your own name at stake, bequeathing what you have to give, so that if the gift is not passed on as promised, then your name is nothing.

To bless is Isaac, on his death bed, giving his son Jacob the commission to carry on the family lineage so that, according to the blessing, Isaac bequeaths to his son Jacob all that the Lord had blessed him with in promising that from his seed would come forth the Savior of all nations.

To bless, then, is a father bestowing upon his son all which belongs to the father's name, bestowing it not because of what the son deserves—for a blessing is never given according to worthiness, and if the son deserved it, then it wouldn't be a blessing, it would be merely just compensation—but the blessing is the father bestowing upon his son all which belongs to his name purely by gift, by promise, purely out of the father's desire to love his son and pass on all which belongs to him.

To bless, then, is the priest standing in front of the people of Israel—these people who had so often overturned the Lord's altar to build an altar to the false god, Baal; these people who had turned away from the Lord's name too often to count, who had not loved their neighbor but had mistreated, and slandered, and torn-down their neighbor's name; these people who had traded their wives for prostitutes, had abandoned their own families, and who were happy to treat their own names as if the most important thing belonging to their own name was not honor, nor generosity shown to others, nor the encouragement they spoke to those beat down, but the most important thing belonging to their own name was the wealth and property, the gold and silver, which they could acquire and hold onto—to bless is the Lord's priest standing in front of this rebellious people and saying to them,

The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you

and be gracious unto you;

²⁶ the LORD lift up his countenance upon you,

and give you peace.

[Numbers 6:25]

The Lord had told the priest to speak that. He placed them in the priestly office for just that purpose, to stand in front of the people, to invoke his Name, and to bestow upon them his blessing.

His blessing is everything that belongs to his Name. It's the promise he made to Adam and Eve to bring forth from Eve's lineage one who would crush the head of Satan.

His blessing is the oath he made to Abraham to give Abraham a son in his lineage, a Son who came into the world by the Name Jesus, so that by the sacrifice of that that son, sinners of all nations would be justified and made holy.

The blessing is the promise he gave to Moses at the burning bush to deliver Israel from slavery and to always be the Lord of life to them. It's the testament he gave to Israel every week at the Ark of the Covenant and the holy Altar that by the blood of the sacrifice he was cleansing them of all sin, and by the invocation of his Name, he was declaring them holy.

The Lord's blessing was the pure gift to the Israelite of his Name and everything of his Name. It was the bestowal of his oath, his promise, his testament, to show mercy, to forgive the sinner, to redeem our lives from the pit, to be merciful and abounding in steadfast love, and the Lord will not betray his own Name.

So the Lord blesses us. He gave his Name in Baptism, giving his oath and promise to forgive our sin, to be our Lord, to keep us as his people, and to be with us forever, even until the end of the age.

He blesses us, bequeathing to us his last will and testament, so that at the gift of his Body to eat and his Blood to drink, he is forgiving our sin, for this is the testament he made as a man going to his death to redeem us with the price of his own Blood.

He blesses, he calls us his own, he gathers us to his Name, and bestows upon us all which belongs to that Name. And he even gives us the words to say to him in response, in prayer, in petition, in thanksgiving, in all our trust and our hope for the future.

If we find ourselves scrambling for how to respond to the unmerited blessing bestowed by a Lord who loves the sinner, even to the point of willingly giving himself over to death on the cross, he gives us the words for response. From Psalm 103:

Bless the LORD, O my soul,

and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

² **Bless the LORD, O my soul,**

and forget not all his benefits,

³ **who forgives all your iniquity,**

who heals all your diseases,

⁴ **who redeems your life from the pit,**

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

The Lord gives us those words to say. He gathers us to his Name, he has his Name bestowed in the Invocation, and he gives us the Psalm to sing to one another and to him. These are living words, words breathed out by the Holy Spirit, words bestowing life, encouraging the beat-down, comforting the crying—these are words delivered by the living God in Heaven to be spoken by those whom he blesses with his Name.

But how do we bless God? Psalm 103:1:

Bless the LORD, O my soul,

and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

We bless him by giving to him all which belongs to our names.

What belongs to our names is our sin. Our fear of death. Our shame we want to hide so that no one associates it with our name. What belongs to our names is what we have built up for ourselves, what we hold onto in stinginess for we don't want it to leave our hands, what we accumulate to try to make our names look shining.

We give it to him. It's called repentance. It's called contrition for sin, and faith that he is a forgiving Lord freeing us from our guilt-bondage. It's a sinner coming to Jesus and saying, *How many times will you forgive me? Seven? Will you forgive me even seventy times seven, forgiving me not piecemeal, not with stinginess and counting up the ledger, but forgiving me daily and fully and down to the very root of my sin? Will you forgive my iniquity, Lord, not according to what I deserve, but according to your steadfast love and mercy and the promise of your Name?*

We commend ourselves to the Lord in that. Our repentance, our faith in his forgiveness, our joy in being a debtor having been sent away from the king's face after having heard him say, *Be at peace, your debt is forgiven, you are free.*

In this, we bless the Lord. For in our repentance and faith, we are, finally, recognizing God for what he blesses us with in his Name. We are recognizing and confessing him as the God who is merciful and forgiving, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and who is always calling the sinner to the blessing of his Name.

And in blessing the Lord, in taking up his words to confess the bestowal of his Name, in singing Psalms in thankfulness for the gifts of his Gospel, our Lord is also taking us up as his servants, taking us up into his holy use, and setting us to speak his blessing to those he loves.

We speak blessing. To the Lord, recognizing who he is. To our family, as we teach of our Lord's salvation. To our neighbor, as we speak in kindness and forgiveness.

To the one weak in faith, we speak welcome. To the one trying to find security by putting himself under rules which seem spiritual, we speak kindness and the freedom of the Gospel. To the one fearful of our

judgment, we speak honor and the grace of Jesus which will stand him before the judgment seat of God in confidence. To the one struggling, we speak comfort.

This is the husband and wife blessing each other; the parents blessing their children; the brothers and sisters in Christ speaking blessing to one another, blessing always, as those who have been blessed by the promise of the Gospel, by the bestowal of the Lord's Name, as those to whom the Lord has given the words for his people to sing:

Bless the LORD, O my soul,

and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

² **Bless the LORD, O my soul,**

and forget not all his benefits,

³ **who forgives all your iniquity,**

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