

Blessed and Blessing

by the Rev. Mary Earle

In our common life, we are shaped by these words at the beginning of our celebrations of Holy Eucharist: “Blessed be God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” And by the response: “And blessed be God’s kingdom, now and forever.”

We begin with blessing, because God’s first action is to bring forth life. That is who God is: the blessed Trinity who continually, eternally, brings forth life out of death.

Blessing is at the center of our worship and at the core of our Christian vocation. We are called to be agents of blessing and to

The Way of Love: BLESS

Share faith and unselfishly give and serve.

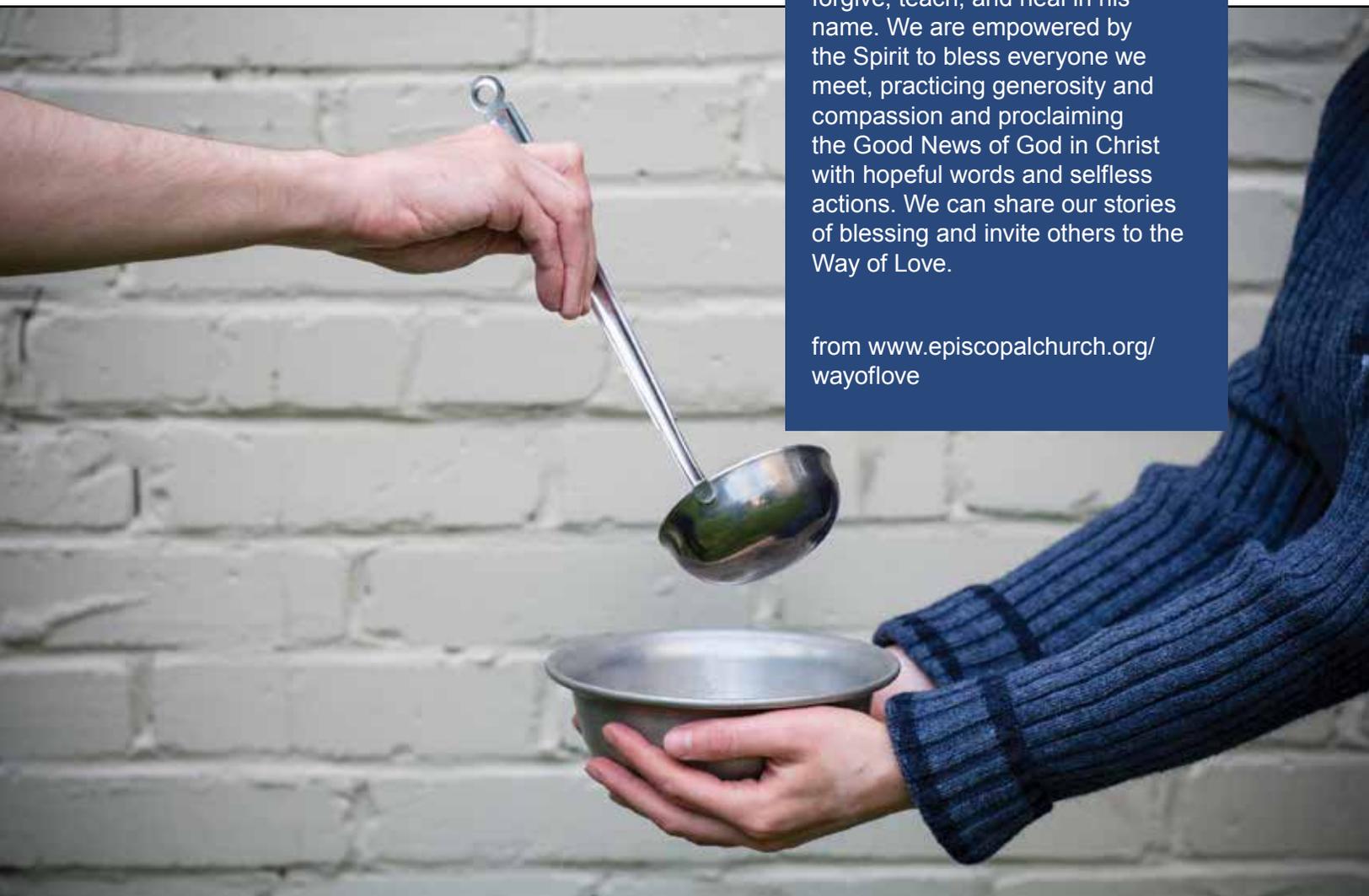
“Freely you have received; freely give.” – Matthew 10:8

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

*People: We will, with God’s help.
– Book of Common Prayer, 305*

Jesus called his disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in his name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite others to the Way of Love.

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be communities that bless our neighbors. When we fail to do this – well, that’s what is called sin. Martin Luther used to say that sin is characterized by “being turned in upon oneself.” In other words, the opposite of blessing.

It is helpful to remember that the English word “bless” comes from an Old English word meaning “blood.” Blessing is deeply linked to circulating life – just as blood circulates through all of the vessels of a living body. In the case of the Christian community, we are called – indeed commanded – to circulate the life of Christ in particular ways, right where we live and move and have our being.

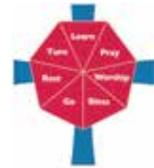
In this way of life, “bless” is being used as an active verb. So when we bless, we are living in such a way that we are offering concrete aid and hope and kindness to those who stand in need. We are schooled in spontaneous generosity and open-handed care. Sometimes this looks like sharing funds or labor. Sometimes it’s a matter of tutoring a child who is struggling to read. Or maybe it’s gathering as a parish and deciding to notice the neighbors who live across the block, and discovering what their needs might be. When we bless, we remember that we are made in the image and likeness of God. When we bless, we look beyond our own needs. We recognize that we have been extravagantly loved and cherished by the living Christ, and that hoarding that blessing is not going to bring joy.

Some years ago at diocesan council, Bishop Robert Hibbs, now of blessed memory, ended a sermon by telling the delegates that we Christians are called to “slather the world with blessing.” In his typical folksy, deeply incarnational manner, Bob encouraged us to remember that we are always being invited to circulate the Gift of God in Christ, dwelling with us and within us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Slathering takes many forms. And slathering is, by its very nature, about abundance. (Just think of really good butter, or rich chocolate icing on a cake.)

In recent months, as I’ve read of the various ministries of our tiniest congregations and the largest ones, I’ve noticed the many ways these Episcopal communities are blessing others. Through ministries of offering food, school supplies, computer tutoring, home building, language skills, pastoral needs, tending to the suffering and the dying, we live out the blessing that we have received. The slathering makes our own lives into sacraments. In the words of St. Augustine of Hippo, we

become what we have received. As the Body of the Living Christ, aided by prayers and intercessions of those who have gone before, we turn toward both our neighbors and toward the aching world. We put down superficial differences and acrimonies. We remember that we hand on what we receive: the blessing of the Holy One. And we watch for those opportunities to slather the world with blessing, delighting in the ways in which living members of the Body of Christ are called to live this life of blessing.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”
(Ephesians 1:3, NRSV). *R*



For Discernment and Reflection

- What are the ways the Spirit is calling you to bless others?
- How will (or does) blessing others – through sharing your resources, faith, and story – become part of your daily life?
- Who will join you in committing to the practice of blessing others?



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