

WE GATHER

[The plants from the ladder-garden have been moved to a "Garden of Gethsemane" location where the congregation will move for the end of the service (or simply to a side location on the chancel) and replaced on the ladder-garden by bowls of water and communion elements… see THIS example for a more substantial way of displaying these on a ladder]

Music for Gathering

Threshold

[accompaniment begins under the Leader's words]

Leader: During the season of Lent, we focused on growing gardens, tending the life that is right in front of us, rather than constantly climbing ladders of what this world defines as success. We have been embracing "good enough" lives and "good enough" selves that are worthy of love, no matter what. In our worship this evening commemorating the last night Jesus spent in community with his disciples, we see a supper in which Jesus showed his beloved friends, and shows us, what "blessing" really means, *regardless*.

"Good Enough"
[sung by a soloist]

What in our lives do we dream about for tomorrow, void of sorrow?
Time spent regretting decisions of our yesterdays, mistakes we made?
Sometimes we get what we get,
life disappoints us and yet,
God is still here and somehow, this faith is good enough.
[repeat with choir/congregation]

Calling on God

Based on Psalm 116

Leader: Let us pray together:

Holy One, You who lay a table of blessing before us,
you have heard us and have come to us.
We lift up the cup of salvation in praise,
we break open and share our love.
Open us this night to your presence
in our gardens of delight and sorrow–
in the simple and good enough moments that fill our days.
Amen.

Opening Hymn/Song

"The Night of His Betrayal"
Text by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
Tune: LLANGLOFFAN 7.6.7.6 D ("Lead On, O King Eternal")

Honest Questions, Compassionate Response

Leader: The mid-20th century brought a particular shift as televangelists began to speak of blessing as a "pact" with God in which our good works (mostly our good wallets) would multiply the prosperity in our lives. But for Jesus, this moment in the Upper Room was full of trouble, danger, deception, and uncertainty. Surely Jesus, Son of God, had enough blessing capital to out-maneuver this set of circumstances! In the midst of the pain of his moment, Jesus defines the real blessing pact–washing feet, breaking the bread, lifting the cup, sharing even with those who are about to betray him. In this moment of silence, take in this graceful invitation of Jesus to the table, no matter what.

Silent Reflection

Leader: Hear this compassionate word: Love that cannot be quantified reminds us that each and every person is blessed, always, regardless of who we are, how we've failed, or what we've accomplished.

Know that already, God is offering us freedom from
never feeling good enough for all the blessings of life and faith,
inviting us to love and to bless in the same way–
indiscriminately, extravagantly.

And know, that despite our sometimes faltering steps,
in the name of Jesus Christ, you are being forgiven, even now.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.
Glory to God! Amen.

The Peace

[invite people to pass the peace in the manner to which you are accustomed, remembering to include the folx at home if you are live-streaming or recording]

WE PROCLAIM

First Reading

Matthew 5: 1-11

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

A Word of God that is still speaking,
Thanks be to God.

Thoughts about an Imperfect Life and Faith

"We are blessed, regardless."

Suggestion: instead of a sermon this night, use all or portions of the #Blessed devotion from "Good Enough" by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Here it is in full:

We don't live in a culture of *blessing*. We live in a culture of #Blessed.

Partially nude bikini shot? #Blessed. Christmas card professional photo shoot where everyone is looking directly at the camera wearing matching chambray tops? #Blessed.

As Christians, we cross-stitch our blessings on pillows, hand-letter them in whimsical fonts, and tattoo them on our bodies, forgetting, perhaps, that Jesus turned the idea of what makes us blessed upside down. His blessings should leave some people wide-eyed, and others with tears of relief streaming down their cheeks.

Jesus says, blessed are you when you are at the end of your rope. When you are exhausted and despairing. When tears are your food, morning and night. When your stomach grumbles and your mouth is dry. Blessed are you who forgives the person who never said sorry and who definitely didn't deserve your forgiveness. You who are ridiculed and humiliated, left out and left behind. The timid and the soft-spoken. The one who works toward peace instead of the easy road of vengeance.

So much of how we interpret these blessings depends on where we are sitting when we hear them.

Maybe we are like the respected and applauded religious leaders in Jesus's time. We've elbowed our way to the front row, or perhaps we were ushered in by privilege and birthright. We say and do the right things. Our righteousness is on full display on Instagram. Our chest puffs with pride at how well life has worked out—our beautiful family, our comfortable bank account, our healthy body. These beatitudes should make us uncomfortable. Because God is celebrating who we try so hard *not* to be. *Dependent. Needy. Desperate.*

These blessings will sound quite different if you're the one at the back of the crowd. The one who barely feels like you belong in the first place. The one who's scared someone will find out that you don't have it all together.

Jesus often taught by taking something conceptual and comparing it to something concrete. For example, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field" (Matthew 13:44). To his hearers who grew up in farms and fields, this would be tactile, not just intellectual. It's a rhetorical device that doesn't need detailed notes or a tape recorder. You'd remember.

In these blessings, it's like Jesus is pulling examples from the very people listening in. "Blessed are you, Jamie, even when you mourn the person you lost." "Blessed are you, Sarah, though you are struggling to find hope." "Blessed are you, John, when there isn't enough to feed your family."

He was looking into the eyes of those who felt like the misfits. And then used the everyday experiences of weeping, hungering, thirsting, suffering as a badge of belonging.

The left out will be welcomed with a warm embrace. The forgotten will not just be remembered but honored. The ones who don't have it all together are exactly who God is inviting into the kingdom. In fact, the whole kingdom belongs to the ones on the edges. This is the upside-down kingdom—directly available to those of us who don't have it all together.

Sometimes the only thing that's possible is to bless life's every present moment—even, and especially, the hard ones. Blessings in those moments fall like a summer rain over the driest times and places in our lives. And though a blessing seems counterintuitive in moments of grief and sorrow, that's when you need to be reminded of the presence of God most—the God whose kingdom is available to all of us.

The world looks a bit strange from here, upside down. But maybe it's how it's supposed to be: our feet rooted in heaven.

A Blessing for When You Don't Feel #Blessed

[music begins to underscore softly under the next readings… consider having 8 voices - each person reads one of the following blessings and then all read the last line… "Blessed are we…" together]

Blessed am I when I lose sleep over what troubles me. When my worries keep me watching the clock tick by. When I have no energy to do anything but fret. The kingdom of God is here and now.

Blessed am I when I am drowning in grief. When wave after wave after wave crashes over me. When I start to feel okay, then something reminds me of what I've lost, and I'm pulled under once again. God promises to comfort me.

Blessed am I when I feel silenced and afraid to speak up. When I am forgotten and left out. When I feel small and feel as though my work, my presence, my life doesn't matter. The whole world is mine.

Blessed am I when I am starving for justice. When the world around me feels so unfair that I could scream, but no one seems to be listening. No one seems to care. May justice flow like a river.

Blessed am I when someone hurts me, when I feel offended, and I don't return insult with insult. Instead, I forgive, recognizing the number of times I've needed to be forgiven.

Blessed am I when I strip away all the extra. When I see the world as it really is—broken, tender, fragile, beautiful. These are the same eyes that see God in everything too.

Blessed am I when I take the hard road. The winding one that doesn't opt for the shortcut of rage or resentment or unkind words. That doesn't pave over with trite niceties, but walks toward peacemaking. For I am God's kid.

Blessed am I when I face hardships of all sorts. Insults, hurt feelings, lies, and vindictive neighbors (why is loving your *actual* neighbor so hard, God?). Blessed am I when I work to usher in God's kingdom of love and compassion and justice and forgiveness and peace, even when it's hard.

Blessed are we. The imperfect and don't-have-it-all- together. God's beloved.

Invitation to the Upper Room

"Broken Body of Christ" by The Many

[this song would be good with a band or small ensemble of singers–as always adapt with a more familiar song of your choice if needed; as the song is played, the communion elements are taken from the ladder and are put in place on the table]

[When the song is over, the next reading takes place]

John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed

your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

A Good Enough Step

Leader: We love blessing people we find easy to love. But Jesus knew that night there were people who would betray him, and he washed their feet anyway. Madeleine L'Engle wrote this in her work, " A Stone for a Pillow":

"We must bless without wanting to manipulate. Without insisting that everything be straightened out right now. Without insisting that our truth be known. This means simply turning whoever it is we need to bless over to God, knowing that God's powerful love will do what our own feeble love or lack of it won't. I have suggested that it is a good practice to believe in six impossible things every morning before breakfast, like the White Queen in Through the Looking Glass. *It is also salutary to bless six people I don't much like every morning before breakfast."*

So now it is your turn. If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes and call to mind six people that "rub you the wrong way," that have made your life less-than-easy, or that you just struggle to like at all. Take your time. Do you see them? *[pause]* Imagine yourself across a water basin from them. Imagine washing their feet, or hands. Imagine blessing them. Even . . . *especially* . . . if you don't want to. Take another few moments to visualize this. *[pause]* I invite you to open your eyes if they have been closed. Not easy. And it is ok if you couldn't bring yourself right now to bring their image into this moment–we can help each other make this good enough step. Let's say one of the oldest blessings "in the Book" together, keeping in mind those we love and those we struggle to love:

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."
(Numbers 6:24–26)

Great Thanksgiving

[All sing, slowly]
Take, O take me as I am;
summon out what I shall be;
set your seal upon my heart
and live in me.

[music may continue to sparingly underscore the following]

The Holy Living God be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts!
We lift them up to the Lord!
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
anytime and everywhere to give thanks to you.
You created this world full of so much beauty and sorrow
and called it Good. And called it Enough.

Although we feel lost at times,
you are ever present.
We doubt, resist, turn away, and rage,
insistent on our own power to pull us through,
and yet sure that we are to blame,
making life seem like a confusing paradox.

But you are patient.
You are here to meet us–reside with us in strange and alienating times,
always faithful, always present
in this Body *[gesture to the table]*…
in this Body *[gesture to the people]*.

And so,
together we proclaim the praise-filled truth of your glory
along with all the saints:

[to the tune of "Take, O Take Me as I Am"]
Holy, holy, God of Hosts!
Heav'n and earth sing out your name!
Blest are they who come today;
and take their place.

[music may continue to sparingly underscore the following]

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.
He proclaimed freedom for the bound,
justice for the oppressed,
grace for the lost,
love for the prodigal.

Through the life and ministry of Jesus,
we can imagine and live into a community
where all who struggle are taken into loving arms
and those who struggle to love are invited into greater compassion.

[underscoring concludes]

On the night in which he gave himself up for us,
he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,
gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Drink from this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me."

And so,
We remember… *[pause, piano enters]*
We offer ourselves… *[pause]*
We proclaim God's time…

[to the tune of "Take, O Take Me as I Am"]
Christ has died, yet Christ is ris'n;
Christ will come once again!
We remember and proclaim
redeeming love.

[piano underscoring continues, crescendo in energy from both piano and presider]

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and fruit of the vine.
Make them be for us blessing for our days,
love for simple and ordinary lives,
fuel for justice in this world.

By your Spirit open us to each other.
Open us to the world,
making us one in you,
through Christ,
in the power of your amazing grace!

[All sing, soaring]
Take, O take me as I am;
summon out what I shall be;
set your seal upon my heart
and live in me.

Lord's Prayer

Communion
"Stay With Me" (choral)

[invite people to communion, strip the altar if that is your tradition, and then to proceed to "the garden"–a location in your worship space, or in the narthex, or outside if weather permits, where the plants from your ladder-garden have been taken for this night, with many candles added… you may even want to plan a Triduum vigil opportunity (from Thursday night to Sunday morning) in this garden space]

The Garden Vigil

Luke 22: 39-53

Leader: You are invited to stay as long as you wish and leave in silence after our final reading from the Gospel of Luke:

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." [Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great

drops of blood falling down on the ground.] When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"

[the people stay and pray and leave in silence as they wish]

Worship Notes:

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Music licenses: *[insert your church's licenses for congregational and choral music]*