

This service was put together by Rev. Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson and used at First Congregational Church, Loveland UCC

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A SEASON OF *Blessing*

**Blessing, most simply, is the act of acknowledging
the presence of the divine in all things.**

Reflection by Rev. Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson

When we bless something, we see, name, and celebrate the sacredness within it. In so doing, we call forth the power of the divine in all things. Sometimes we are casual about our blessings -- the kiss we give a loved one as they walk out the door or the song we sing in the shower. But when we are intentional about the act of blessing, we find that it is not simply words or a gesture. Instead, it is “a peace-making, earth-shaking, dead-waking, light-creating, dark-abating act”¹ of love.

Blessing changes us. It binds us to the things we bless. After all, you don’t think that God would allow us to call forth divine power and then not use us to fulfill that blessing, do you? After all, “your blessing is your covenant.... When you lift up your hands, when you extend your arms,... when you call down the source-of-all-that-is power of God, you can be sure that you will be part of God’s plan.”²

So, this season, let us bless. Flash a smile to the grocery store teller. Serve someone in need. Share time with your beloved ones. Let someone else care for you. Consider how you use your time, talents and treasure. Notice and receive the God’s gifts and offer gifts of your own in gratitude and joy.

Why? Because we were made to bless. Because calling forth the sacred already in the world helps us to see, experience and live it. And because the blessing lasts. *“It lives in the community that mediated the blessing and continues to hold it in memory and celebration; it lives in the hope that persists; it lives most of all in the love that called forth the blessing in the first place—the love that is... as strong as death”* (Jan Richardson). So, this season, let us call

¹ SALT Project video “Bless.”

² *ibid.*

forth blessings. Let us be blessed that we too might bless the world with a love that does not end, a love that is as strong as death.

Blessed by Presence

Blessing, most simply, is the act of acknowledging
the presence of the divine in all things.

Blessing our Neighbors

We ring our church bell as a reminder to all that God is near.

Blessing our Sacred Space [prelude]

We listen to music and carry in light and God's word as we gather our hearts for worship.

Welcome

*Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey,
you are a beloved child of God, and you are welcome here!*

Blessing our Gathering in Word & Song Inspired by Psalm 148, Rev. Dale-Ferguson

Come, siblings -- human, bird, animal, insect, fish and beast:

Praise God!

Come mountain goat, marmot, ptarmigan, hummingbird and eagle,

Praise God from the heights!

Come angler fish, great blue whale, bottle-nosed dolphin, coral and krill,

Praise God from the depths!

Come bugling elk, burrowing rock squirrel, and wandering pine marten,

Praise God from the forest!

Come black-tailed jackrabbit, mule deer, and red-diamond rattler,

Praise God from the desert!

Come howler monkey, tree frog, toucan, and jaguar,

Praise God from the jungle!

Come horse and donkey, steer and cow, llama and goat,

Praise God from farm and home!

Come dog and cat, parrot, hamster and rat, fish, rabbit and chicken,

Praise God from the neighborhood!

Come, siblings -- human, bird, animal, insect, fish and beast:

Let us make a joyful noise to God our creator!

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!

God in three persons, blessed Trinity! Amen.

Sharing Christ's Peace

May the peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Blessed by Prayer

Prayer is intrinsically an act of blessing.
It is the practice of paying attention to God's presence.

Sharing Our Blessings & Burdens

You are invited to share your joys, sorrows, fears, hopes, and celebrations.

Pastoral Prayer Adapted from words by Shantha Ready Alonso, A Child Laughs
God, thank you for all the ways your creatures have ministered to us today.

For the fruits and vegetables, we have eaten, we thank the bees, butterflies and bats that pollinated them.

For the air we breathe, we thank the trees that cycled carbon dioxide into oxygen, as well as the birds and woodland creatures that carry and bury seeds to help trees multiply and forests thrive.

For the water that has quenched our thirst, and washed our bodies, dishes and clothes, we thank the fish, otters, turtles and other creatures for sharing it with us.

For sounds that fill our day: buzzing, chirping, purring, barking, scurrying, squawking, neighing, mooing -- we thank the diversity of creatures for reminding us that we are not alone.

God of all creation, thank you for the diversity of creatures in your web of creation, of which we are just one. Thank you for entrusting this web of creation to our care.

Open our eyes to the ways all life reveals truths about you, our Creator. Open our minds to new insights from your creatures' gifts -- how they solve problems, build community, and embrace their creature-hood. Open our hearts to cherish, protect, restore, and rightly share our common home, the earth. In gratitude and hope we pray. Amen.

An Environmental Responsive Lord's Prayer

Adapted from Words from Creation Care Prayers, the Church of England

Our Father who art in heaven

You are also at home in the air, soil forests and Oceans

Hallowed be thy name

By the care we take of your creation

Thy kingdom come

All that you see is good

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Your will to till and care

Give us this day our daily bread

That all may have enough to live life in fullness.

And forgive us our debts:

Our greed, our exploitation, our lack of concern for other species and for future generations

As we forgive our debtors

By reconciliation with justice and peace

And lead us not into temptation

The temptation to equate dominion with exploitation

But deliver us from evil

The evil of destroying your gift of creation

For thine is the kingdom

Thine, O God, not ours

The power and the glory

In the cross and resurrection

For ever and ever

You are the beginning and you are the end.

Amen.

Blessed With & By Our Children

Children (and those with the heart of a child) are invited to come forward.

Hymn of Response

“Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

TEXT: Robert Robinson; adapted by Margaret Clarkson. MUSIC: Traditional American melody; John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music*, 1813. All rights reserved. Reprinted under onelicense.net #A717-694

Blessed by God's Grace

When we find ourselves feeling separate or distant from God,
grace (sometimes called forgiveness) brings us back.

Confessing Our Need for Grace

Adapted from words by Rev. Dan Smith & John Polhill

Today, as we celebrate God's goodness in creation, we also acknowledge the harm we have caused by our action and inaction, and we seek God's grace to heal what we have harmed. Please join me in confessing our need for that grace:

Merciful Creator, we confess our blindness to your presence in creation and our disregard for the creatures of this planet. Our human hearts are set on personal gain and material wealth, and our drive for more has caused great damage.

We lament the harm we have done. Hear and bless our cries:

Bless the tears we shed for the resources we have squandered.

Bless the sighs we breathe out for the atmosphere.

Bless the heads we hang for the creatures lost and exploited.

Bless the hands we wring for the ecosystems we have shattered and the precious gifts we have wasted.

Bless us as we lament. Cradle us as we regret. Forgive us our sins against your beloved creation and empower us to walk humbly with you and with one another. Reconnect us with the web of creation and lead us to the community you envision for us, the creatures of your beloved creation. Amen.

Receiving God's Grace

Beloved ones, hear the good news: God our Creator is merciful, and forgives our sins. God restores us as we start afresh. God gives us new hearts to bear Christ's love to all inhabitants of the earth, and to advocate for their protection and well-being. Amen.

Bringing Our Gifts

Blessing Our Gifts *[Sung]* *"With Grateful Joy"*

God's Word Genesis 1:24-31a & Words by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Blessing Before Reading

God's word is a blessing to all God's people.

Open our hearts that we may hear.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

Response

The word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

Our second reading is written by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Love all God's creation,

the whole and every grain of sand of it.

Love every leaf, every ray of God's light.

Love the animals, love the plants,

love everything.

If you love everything,

You will perceive the divine mystery in things.

Once you perceive it,

you will begin to comprehend it

Better every day.

And you will come at last

to love the whole world

With an all-embracing love.

May God bless our hearing and understanding of this word.

Reflecting on God's Word

[Sermon]

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Blessing is a communal and circular act.

When we attend to God's presence and love, we trust.

When we trust, we experience God's love and respond by passing it on.

Words of Thanksgiving & Blessing for God's Creation

Thandiwe

[A slide show with photos of people's pets as well as other animals in creation was used following these words of blessing]

For all the animals in creation, **We give thanks!**

For the fun and friendship we have with animals, **We give thanks!**

For these animals that we love, **We give thanks!**

Let us bless the animals whose pictures we will see shortly, those that live in our homes, those that we have loved and those with whom we share creation:

Behold, creature of God, you are precious and beloved! May you be blessed with safety and love, an integral part of the web of creation.

Screen share of animal pictures:

Blessed to be a Blessing Adapted from words by Erice Fairbrother, [Gifts in Open Hands](#)

Let us: Take care of this world,

It is a gift to us.

Find love in all people,

They share it with us.

Make peace unconditionally,

All life depends on it.

Let us be a blessing.

Always and amen.

Sung Response

Taking God's Music, Light & Word into the World

Our worship ends so that our service may begin.