

Devotion, Week of October 8, 2023

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

The word “bless” is an abstract term. We use it in a number of different ways – to say “bless you” when someone sneezes, which originated during the plagues in Europe because people with plague would cough and sneeze. Pope Gregory suggested that people say this as a prayer that perhaps would save them from death. Another explanation is that people used to believe a sneeze caused someone to expel their soul out of their body, and so “God bless you” or “Bless you” was used as a protection against the devil snatching your soul. Why do we still do it today? Who knows??

In the South, we often use the term “Bless Your Heart,” when what we really mean is that this person is so pitifully lacking in understanding that this is all we can say – maybe someday this person will get a clue.

But “blessing” in the Bible refers to God’s care for us. God brings good things into our lives, and those are blessings. To bless someone is to acknowledge goodness and power in them – power that comes from God. The word appears over 300 times in the Bible – often when God blesses someone, like Jacob, who he renames Israel, or when a patriarch blesses his heir – like Isaac did with Jacob (mistaking him for Esau). Blessings are powerful – in Old Testament times the blessing was the equivalent of a will, conferring property to the heir. God’s blessings were similar – he gave Abram his blessing, renamed him Abraham, and said he would have wealth and descendants as numerous as the stars.

At Shabbat dinner in traditional Jewish homes, the parents bless the children, as the Sabbath begins to be celebrated. God blesses us in small ways every day. Jim’s grandmother’s favorite hymn was “Count Your Blessings.” She believed that every day was a new opportunity to receive blessings, and to shower others with blessings. Life was always a wonderful garden path full of wonderful fruits and vegetables. She surrounded her house with flower beds and loved to go out and enjoy them. A fresh peach was heaven. Life gave her simple pleasures, because she knew that God created all those good things around her for her enjoyment. So she always thanked God for these simple blessings.

I try to remember Big Mama’s joy in God’s creation as I look at my flowers and enjoy a good vegetable from the garden. It reminds me that God blesses me every day.

Jeanne