

“Original Blessings”

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Decatur
Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, September 30, 2012

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Genesis 1:1-5, 26–31; 2:1-3

Genesis 1

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to 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 wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,

in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

28 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.” 29 God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 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. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Original Sin, Original Blessings

Augustine of Hippo's theological interpretation of the Garden of Eden
changed history.

Previous to his life and work in the late 300s and early 400s,

the story of God's power to create

and the gift of creation and humanity

had been understood theologically as a
blessing.

However, Augustine of Hippo (November 13, 354 – August 28,
430) saw it differently,

choosing to see procreation, conception, and the origin of
humanity

as fallen, as born of sin,

and in need of immediate and lifelong
salvation.

Augustine was a prolific writer; he wrote well, and his teachings

have influenced the church and the world for over 1,700
years.

The Church of Jesus Christ, for the most part, adopted his theology as
sacrosanct.

How many of us were taught to pray, "In sin did my mother conceive
me"?

How often have we focused on Adam and Eve's coverings and cover-up,

yet passed on celebrating the joy of being made in the image
of God?

So, my friends, instead of receiving the Garden of Eden

and the creativity of God

to initiate and transform lives as original blessings,

we have been taught for over 1,700 years

that the Garden of Eden was as a place of original sin.

We have been in recovery ever since.

Augustine's theology of original sin has influenced generations

to practice condemnation, guilt, judgment,

repression and divisive relationships in our culture.

His teachings have shaped our perception of human sexuality,

including our culture's degrees of acceptance

of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Our faith walk and our relationships need not be shaped this way.

We have the power to choose to see and receive as a blessing

and not a curse or sin

the divine gifts of life and love,

of human intimacy and social interactions.

We can choose to say what the child's poster says,

"God created me, and God don't make no junk."

The Holy Scriptures are living reminders of the power of God's blessing.

Genesis 1: God made the world, God separated day from night,
God made the earth and the seas and humanity
and each time said, *“It is good. You are good.”*

In the Gospels we read that at the baptism of Jesus,
the voice of God is heard to say,

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

These are incredible words of praise of a proud parent...

and when God said these words to Jesus,

He had not even begun his earthly ministry
in Galilee or Nazareth or Samaria or
Jerusalem.

The Creator extended an original blessing of love and affirmation,
blessings offered not for a job well done but for a soul well
made.

God’s blessing upon you is unconditional.

It is unabashed joy.

It is unloosed without regard to accomplishment or fulfillment or
success.

God is pleased because Jesus simply is.

And that is enough.

This, my friends, is an original blessing.

You know, Jesus went forth from the River Jordan,
soaking wet and cleansed by the Spirit of God,
feeling so good and so loved that He loved us as we
are.

His ministry is one of allowing people to have room to change,
to be converted, to be transformed, to be themselves.

His only words of judgment are against those who practice
the sin of hypocrisy.

Blessed, Jesus went forth and blessed us.

Did you ever notice that when you feel affirmed and supported,
you are much more apt to affirm others.

Who has blessed you? Who blesses you today?

Where and from whom do you hear words of affirmation?

Is Christ's church such a place for you?

Think back over your years, think back over your relationships,
think back over the last week, who has blessed you,
encouraged and affirmed you simply because you
are?!

A blessing is a word of empowerment that makes you more than you
were.

It is a divine act of grace, extended from one child of God to another,
given unconditionally, without strings attached

or any expectation of repayment.

Treasure those words of hope and prayer and challenge.

Receive them.

Remember them.

Let them wash over you. Revisit them.

Keep them alive in a feel-good file in your desk draw or in your mind.

You are an original blessing, made in the image of God,

and you deserve to be affirmed as a beloved child of God.

Resound the blessings you have been given by God and God's people.

To resound blessings is to let them echo forth from you,

to give these original blessings a new life and fresh legs,

to share them with someone else,

unconditionally, unabashedly, unashamedly,
uninhibitedly!

Do you resound grace or guilt, goodness or gripes?

You see, what we resound, what we echo, what we express really matters.

The blessings we resound reach the present and touch the future.

Children Learn What They Live By Dorothy
Law Nolte

If children live with criticism, They learn to condemn. If children live

with hostility, They learn to fight. If children live with ridicule, They learn to be shy. If children live with shame, They learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, They learn confidence. If children live with tolerance, They learn to be patient. If children live with praise, They learn to appreciate. If children live with acceptance, They learn to love. If children live with approval, They learn to like themselves. If children live with honesty, They learn truthfulness. If children live with security, They learn to have faith in themselves and others. If children live with friendliness, They learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

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This week, let's rewrite history.

Make a point to say to someone,

“You are good. You are God’s beloved, with whom I am well pleased!”

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!