

As the prelude began the couple sitting behind us raised their voices so they could hear each other over the music. I wanted to turn around and politely (well, maybe not so politely) ask them to end their conversation or take it outside the sanctuary. I was not concerned about their latest pedicure. I wanted a few quiet moments in preparation for worship. I recalled the comment of Jesus, *“My house shall be a house of prayer”* (Luke 19:46).

As I read our Scripture from Acts this morning, I asked, “Where would I go to find a place of prayer?” Tradition tells that in communities without a Synagogue the faithful will gather on the Sabbath for prayer, usually by a river. When one begins to think about it, we do a lot of things in “church” but corporate prayer is probably on the low end of the spectrum. Even in worship, prayer seems to be one of the “least of these”. Yes, I am confident that all of you spend time in prayer daily. But, as a congregation how much time do we spend in corporate prayer? What part does prayer play in our worship experience? Thus, as we come to this Table this morning I want us to spend some of our time in prayer.

Both Matthew and Mark write that as Jesus took the bread he blessed it and then as he took the cup he gave thanks. I wondered if there was a difference. I asked a NT scholar and he said the words used are two different Greek words but they have similar meaning. Others commented. But I still wondered. Is there a difference between a blessing and giving thanks?

I found this definition of blessing on the net, “that they (the blessed) might experience the favor of God”. My mind went to an experience in Manila. The Xtreme Team was visiting a home for boys rescued from the streets. We had spent the evening helping them with homework, playing games, singing, etc. with them. It was time for them to get to bed and us to leave. They lined up and took our hands and placed them on their heads. We asked why. The director told us that they were seeking our blessing. It was important for them that we bless them. We did. What else could we do?

Who would you want to bless this morning? Paul writes to the congregation in Rome, *“Bless them who persecute you”* (Romans 12:14). Make a list of the persons you want God to bless this morning. Remember the definition, “that they might experience the blessing of God”.

May the blessing of light be on you
(Scottish Blessing Prayer)

May the blessing of light be on you, light without and light within. May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire, so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it. And may light shine out of the two eyes of you, like a candle set in the window of a house, bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm. And may the blessing of the rain be on you, may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean, and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines, and sometimes a star. And may the blessing of the earth be on you, soft under your feet as you pass along the roads, soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day; and may it rest easy over you when, at last, you lie out under it. May it rest so lightly over you that your soul may be out from under it quickly; up and off and on its way to God. And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly.

May The Road
Rise Up To Meet You (Celtic Blessing)

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
May the rains fall soft upon your fields
and until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

We share the bread of blessing.

May this bread remind us of Christ's love.
May this bread rekindle in us a loving Spirit.
May this bread change and mend our hearts.
May this bread bring life anew.
May the very eating of this bread bind us together
as one in Christ. Amen.*

A little over 20 years ago on Good Friday (March 1996) a man wielding a knife massacred a teacher and students at a school in Dunblane, Scotland. A dear friend who was living about 4 miles from Dunblane wrote a prayer expressing her feelings regarding the event and hate in our world. Her prayer may be even more relevant today. Might we be in the spirit of prayer as I share a portion of it.

God says, I have seen the misery of my people. I have heard their cry, I know their sufferings. I will come and deliver them.

When we want healing at the core of our being, we turn to you again, O Lord. You are the one who is present even in our distress, for through the cross of Jesus Christ you share in the oppression of all who are suffering. You are the light that never goes out. You are the eye that never closes. You are the ear that is never shut. You are the mind that never gives up. You are the heart that never grows cold, and you are the hand that never stops teaching. Come, Holy Spirit, and share your comfort. Breathe new life into those who are broken-hearted. Lift up those who are crushed. And bring healing to our land.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Pain-bearer, Life giver, and Faithful Friend. Amen.**

The Scripture then tells us that towards the end of the meal Jesus took the cup and gave thanks. How often have you given thanks? What have you been thankful for this week? What have you been thankful for this year? Take some time and make a list of whom or what you have been thankful for.

Now, how many of you have God's grace on your list? When I made mine I didn't add it. Wondered if maybe I take God's grace too much for granted. I found a wonderful prayer of grace in C. Welton Gaddy's book, Prayer: from Adoration to Zeal, that reminds us to be thankful for the grace God has given and continues to give. Listen. Pray with me.

Keep before us the truth that the grace we administer to others will always be the grace you offer to us—
never deserved,
always costly,
never easy,
always risky,
never understandable,
always controversial.

Neither time nor circumstances will ever be right for grace. Remind us that if they were, something other than grace would suffice.

Close our ears to comments from others as you reassure us that grace will always look

ill-advised,
foolish,
soft of sin,
ridiculous,
hilarious.

Accept our thanks as beneficiaries of grace, O God. Create within us a commitment to live as servants of grace.

We pray as we seek to behave in theme of the One who embodied "grace upon grace." Amen.

We share with thanksgiving the Cup of Christ.

The Blessing and Benediction God gives to Moses to have Aaron say over the people of God (Num. 6:24-25):

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
The Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985

NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988

**Prayer, Olive Drane, March 1996

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Gaddy, C. Welton, Prayer: From Adoration to Zeal. Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA 19481 (1993)