

## **Count Our Blessings!**

Text: Genesis 12: 1-4; II Corinthians 9: 10-12

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**A song about a circle, the prose of Genesis and the vast blessings of life** ó yours, mine and ours together: these gifts come to the pulpit with me this morning.

**Let's start with the song**, or more precisely, the poetic strophes of a British lyricist and author by the name of Tim Rice. His artistic genius is renown, not only in his native England but also around the world, such that Queen Elizabeth knighted him ó Sir Timothy ó an honor bestowed for his significant contribution to the arts.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Timothy wrote the lyrics for the title song of Disney's *Lion King*. It's called the Circle of Life and is masterfully conceived ó blending archetypal truth, empowering vision, and inspiring poetry. It's better to hear it sung, so I turn for some help from my friends . . .

(Youth Ensemble will sing)

*From the day we arrive on the planet,  
and blinking, step into the sun;  
there's more to see than can ever be seen,  
more to do than can ever be done!  
There's far too much to take in here,  
more to find than can ever be found,  
but the sun rolling high,  
through the sapphire sky,  
keeps great and small on the endless round.*

*It's the Circle of Life and it moves us all,  
through despair and hope, through faith and love  
'til we find our place on the path unwinding  
in the Circle the Circle of Life.*

Powerful, beautiful words! And profoundly spiritual, too! It's all about the endowment of life unfolding. More: it's about taking in and then returning life's energy in an ongoing circle of mystery and discovery, from our first breath until we find our place in the benevolence and grace of God's awesome ongoing gift.

If all that we might do this morning were to take Sir Timothy's words to heart, it would be sermon enough for us all!

**But let's go deeper** and turn the lens toward the Bible. Because this theme that Sir Timothy so eloquently presents - of life offered and received, this give and take, this reciprocal exchange of the giftedness of life - is absolutely core to our ancestral story in scripture as we are given to find our place.

Take a peek with me. Abram was old when the circle became real to him, and Sarah not a whole lot younger. Perhaps any of us needs a good dose of life experience to understand the truth that lies beneath what they were hearing. The encounter was not at all long or complicated. God said to Abram ó though Sarah was but a step away, òGo as I will show you . . . I will bless you . . . so that you will be a blessing . . . and by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.ö

I wonder: can you see the circle? Can you fathom cyclical design? Do you hear the invitation? òI will show you . . . I will bless you . . . so that you will be a blessing . . . and that you will bless.ö

That encounter set the circle in motion. This amazing gift is to be re-gifted, recycled, reinvested, and tossed back into the equations of human life never to stop. Love and grace and faith and blessing and mercy are given in extravagance by the Creator only to be passed on in exactly that same spirit all over again among the Creator's creatures!

**Let's bring it right here**, because, like Abraham and Sarah, we are also blessed. Honestly, we are. I mean that particularly for you, and also for me. But lest we fall into the trap of individualism, there's a communal dimension, too. In fact, the gift of biblical blessing always carries a sense of òwe-nessö rather than merely òme-ness.ö

A dozen of us have been in a conversation over this past year about First Church and the many blessings and challenges that are a part of our common life. Larry Peers has been our guide through an evaluative process called appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry begins with the understanding that people and organizations grow and evolve best by beginning with their strengths.

I wish you could have been a fly on the wall as we reflected on all that we have been given right here. An awesome location . . . a history of service . . . intergenerational learning . . . devoted members . . . inspiring music . . . outreach in multiple directions . . . nourishing worship . . . good news . . . quiet presence . . . growing souls . . . fabulous sermons (okay, I admit it, I put that one in!) . . . volunteerism . . . making a difference . . . Habitat . . . book studies . . . food for friends . . . an inclusive understanding of God . . . spiritual vitality . . . enthusiastic children . . . our library . . . the nursery school. The words of Sir Timothy circle back, òThere's far too much to take in here! More to find than can ever be found!ö

**So, here's the pitch** for today and these next several weeks. It's that time in our circle of life here at First Church to do some intentional and creative wondering about the blessings we have received as individuals and as a community, and our will to be active and engaged in giving back.

But here's the rub: truthfully, in my three and a half decades in pastoral ministry, I have noticed this very odd and curious disconnect in every community I have served ó with only occasional exceptions. The more that people have been blessed with life's abundance, the harder it seems to give back. Go figure! Time and again it seems our

nature to diminish the magnitude of our blessings when we are counting them, and then exaggerate the extent of our giving back part! (This is statistically verifiable!)

A person of significant means, rich by every measure, was speaking about how blessed he was. It had been a very good year for him, a very good life, and he had far more in worldly terms and rewards than any of us would call good and plenty. As verbatim as I can tell you, he said to me, "If there is ever anything I can do for the church to give back, you just say the word." And so I told him some of the challenges that church was facing at the time. He nodded *as if he understood*, and then he said it again, "If there is ever anything I can do for the church to give back, you just say the word." So I called him by name, with kindness, and asked if he was hearing our conversation.

**God did not say** to Sarah and Abraham, "I will bless you . . . so that you can think about and explain and rationalize your part in the circle of benevolence." God said, rather, "I will bless you . . . that you will be a blessing." Reciprocity, extravagance, willingness, and delight are all a part of the package!

Please: think about this and pray about it and consider your part, as I do mine. Because the call to count our blessings is not so we can keep them . . . but so we can give them back to the circle . . . that all families of the earth shall be blessed. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, 2013: Timothy Miles Bindon Rice.

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