

Being the Blessing

Good evening and thank you for inviting me to share some thoughts on being the blessing in our workplaces.

I have to say its great to be here, among real people to share together, I don't know about the other extroverts in the room and on Zoom but I found lockdown totally brutal

My introvert friends I think fared better than me! Seriously, no matter our personality types we've actually all faced so many challenges through the pandemic. But God isn't finished with us yet and tonight we're going to work out what that might mean as we rejoin our colleagues in the new season of the new future as God's kingdom builders at work!

I'm also glad to be here because my relationship with Chaplaincy Plus goes back a long way to 2007 when I was working as a consultant to AWM. With my boss Stephen Gray and the lovely Geni Hall[some of you may know] we began to meet and pray together at work

We were a minority Christian group at the agency which had around 350 employees at the time, and very quickly we had around 25 Christians join the group. Pentecostals, Baptists, Brethren, Anglicans and Methodists and a Moravian I recall too! All flavours of Christianity meant we needed a starting point, some common ground, so we invited Chris Dinsdale from C+ to come and lead us in the God at Work course- to get us all on the same page

Through Chaplaincy Plus we invited the team from the Cathedral to come and share at our Carols event, Jenni provided the choir, and Nigel Hand preached the gospel, but I have to say the memorable take away were Stephen Grays prayers. He prayed for the staff, the cleaners, the economy, that Jaguar Landrover would get the i54 site and more..... I know this had impact because colleagues spoke to me about it in January- saying they couldn't get over his prayers, didn't even know you could pray for the economy

The agency was closed down by the coalition government but our group lasted right up until the final day offering Alpha at work for those who needed spiritual as well as practical substance.

Chris and Clair Dinsdale became my Chaplains until I left for Theological College in 2010- Stephen continued to be a great support, and after Chris retired I was a little bit involved with Antony and the team to make Steve's appointment. We're all still very good friends I'm happy to report!

So the journey into ministerial training brought me full circle into chaplaincy at work. In 2012 after coming out of the vicar school formational washing machine[technical term] the call wasn't to ordination but to ministry in the workplaces of Staffordshire, through the Chamber of Commerce where I sat on the board.

I knew this was mission, and so to that end I asked for a small group to be my accountable to including the Bishop, Chris, Lloyd Cooke the CEO of Saltbox and the Methodist Chair Peter Barber- my note to myself was don't go it alone! We all need to be accountable to each other don't we?

We launched Ministry at Work in November 2012, as mission to business, the bridge between the church and the civic spaces. We had no funding and no home, but plenty of open doors

There are 10 of us now, working as voluntary Chaplains to the professional services sector, and we have three of those embedded within the Chambers of Commerce, Wade Ceramics and Unitas a sister organisation to Stoke City Council.

You will all have a story of your own faith journeys, and I'm sure that as part of the C+ wider network you are all ministering in your own ways where God has placed you.

The last 20 months has left us all different to before- faith may be strong, church may be there, but from those I see as a spiritual companion, and those who talk to me for pastoral support, people have floundered, they're tired and some are hanging on to the heel of heaven and waiting for God's direction.

I hope this is useful for context? Later we have a slot for questions if anyone wants to ask anything, and there will be time at the end as well.

This brings me to our topic for this evening, I'm sharing my simple knowledge with you, a bit of experience, and I hope to convey that even when we feel empty or depleted we can still bless others because, Blessing is universal and for all people in all situations.

In Genesis 12:2-3 God says to Abram

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed

The blessing wasn't to be kept but to be shared and given away, its to be imparted to others

This is not time dependant as we measure time but through God's eternal timing, It's still alive today, we can all do it

Russ Parker in his great book "Rediscovering the ministry of blessing" shows how Jesus models blessing and how we can learn from him and adopt his ways- he goes on to explain that blessing begins at home

Deuteronomy 28:3-6 in the Message says this

All these blessings will come down on you and spread out beyond you because you have responded to the Voice of GOD, your God:

GOD's blessing inside the city,
GOD's blessing in the country;
GOD's blessing on your children,
the crops of your land,
the young of your livestock,
the calves of your herds,
the lambs of your flocks.
GOD's blessing on your basket and bread bowl;
GOD's blessing in your coming in,
GOD's blessing in your going out.

The connection between faithfulness to God and the blessings that result pour into all aspects of life beginning with well-being in the home and community

Jesus himself teaches the apostles how to bless

In Mark 10.13-16 he ends with

Let the little children come to me, do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it- And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Jesus blesses spontaneously linking the ability to receive the kingdom of God directly into our hearts. There is a link between the prayer of blessing and an expected outcome.

So bless with a clear focus and outcome- this is much better than repeating well-intentioned words, and it mirrors the confidence with which Jesus blessed

Jesus shows blessing through being alongside and hospitality

Luke recounts the story of the Emmaus road encounter, well known story about the disciples walking with Jesus the 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus without recognising who he was. As he recounts the scriptures to them they still don't recognise him- yet when they invite him for supper as was the custom, Jesus breaks the bread it all falls into place

Its an informal intimacy that has set up the experience of encountering Jesus. As we stay alongside people, who may not know Jesus, we are powerfully modelling what Jesus did that day. In blessing the bread, feeding the 5000, here feeding the 4 of them, he declares he is the saviour of the world. My own interpretation of this, is that as we invite others to share coffee and a cake with us, we have prepared and mirrored a Jesus moment for the blessing to be transferred from us to them, because that's Gods intention and we are the conduit- The Mo School of Theology!!

The final blessing prayer of Jesus in the gospels is the blessing of the ascension. Luke recounts this in Ch 24:50-51

He then led them out of the city over to Bethany. Raising his hands he blessed them, and while blessing them, made his exit, being carried up to heaven.

We don't actually know what Jesus said, but the effect was immediate, it produced worship and witness in the lives of the disciples.

Augustine said that When the Ascension of Jesus comes to life for us, everything else in the Christian faith will acquire a new and vital significance.

As a new convert to Christianity aged 38, this made total sense to me- Jesus died, to rise and leave the Holy Spirit with us forever- it all fell into place and I knew Jesus then as my Saviour, I felt his grace pour into my life. Isn't that what we desire for our friends, families and colleagues? The rest is then up to God

This ties nicely into the Matthew account of Jesus giving the Great Commission- to go out and make disciples

This is our commission to bless. The ascension becomes our invitation to take up the ministry of blessing and use it.

We leave the Old and New Testament to come closer to home. During the 5th and 8th centuries the Celtic communities that flourished in the British Isles synthesised the Christian life, and culture together with a rhythm of blessing

Professor Ian Bradley writes

“Columba is portrayed by Adamnan his biographer as making the sign of the cross and invoking the blessing on a fruit tree, a block of salt, a pail of milk as well as on his monks on the island of Iona and its inhabitants. There were reported miracles as well, but it’s the routine of pronouncing blessings that attracted many people to Iona to be blessed by the Saint”

Blessing is good news

Blessings are not just limited to the saints

The gaelic prayers and poems compiled by Alexander Carmichael called the Carmina Gadelica includes daily tasks such as lighting the fire, milking the cow and preparing for bed

The majority though are to do with healing.

The blessing conveyed in an almost physical sense a portion of God’s grace and goodness.

The central conviction of these prayers were embedded in the reverence for the Lords creation, that this is where God meets us

We can all recall the recent times when under lockdown we have yearned to get outside, to see the sky and grateful we could exercise for an hour a day. The created order blessed us. Scientist tell us that for our well-being smelling the earth, noticing the plants and flowers, the joy of growing things builds up our mental health.

So we have looked at what the Jesus teaches us, how the Celtic faith practiced blessing but for us, how do we bless?

That’s what we are going have a go at doing next, putting some of this into practice, but first we want to give you a few minutes for questions-

Q&A

How to bless

First Prepare ourselves

Secondly who or what are we blessing

Thirdly decide what to say

Fourthly show our dependence on God

Pronounce the blessing

If possible speak to the person

Speaking to an absent person

I often use the Be Still prayer to get me into a reflective spot

Lets use that now-

Say the words internally

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I Am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

Ask God now to show you a person, or bring to mind a situation, place, be still and see what comes

What do you feel you would like to say- write down a few notes

What's on your heart for that person- be specific- what's needed for them to flourish as the person God has called them to be?

What good outcomes might you want God to bring to them, or the place, or the situation?

Avoid too many distracting words- pray love, peace, in abundance for example

Recognise our dependence on God

Refer to him- eg.-

May God who is love and light,

May God who is our everlasting support

May God who never lets us down bestow on you his unending support

By pronouncing your blessing with May allows the outcome to be firmly in God's hands and not pre-desired by us- we trust God with this person/situation/place

If you are blessing the person remember to mentally be bowing your knee before them as you honour God in them, because Jesus bows the knee as he washes our feet so to speak

We are humble because God is humble

Watch your expression and tone of voice, model love

If the person is not there picture the person in front of you, maybe imagine them across the street and call out to them

“George! I bless you today in all your busyness, I bless you with the Fathers love, may you know how much God loves you”

Take some time to write your ideas down- have a chat about your blessing to someone beside you-

Our blueprint for blessing is the most well known blessing in the world

Found in numbers 6.24-26

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 towards you and give you peace.

We’re going to listen to this sung as The Blessing Song- do sing if you wish, or let it soak into you

End with Blessing song

Thank you so much for listening to me, thanks to Steve for inviting me , to close can I share this Celtic blessing with you all

May the road rise up to meet you

May the wind be always at your back

May the sunshine warm your face

And rains fall soft upon your fields

And until we meet again

May God hold you in the palm of his hand

Amen

References

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bless-Space-Between-Us-Blessings/dp/0385522274>

Russ Parker <https://amzn.to/3mS0mZm>

Carmina Gaedelica <https://amzn.to/3oaxgpk>

Columba biography <https://bit.ly/308K3AK>