

Thanksgiving 2010 Sermon “I AM BLESSED” St. James’ Church by Ron Kolanowski

How are you today?...How are you today really?....I want you to try something. When I ask you ‘how are you today’ I want you all to say, “I AM BLESSED.” Ready. “How are you today? I AM BLESSED. Let’s try again, “How are you today?” I AM BLESSED.

I AM BLESSED. I AM BLESSED That's how I was greeted each morning when I walked into the Assisted Living Building at Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, MD. I walked in usually around 8:00a.m. and the very first person I would see was Nelly, who cleaned our common spaces, hallways and bathrooms. I would ask, “How are you today.” And she would say... I AM BLESSED. Then she would ask me “how are you?...and by then I would say, I AM BLESSED TOO.” Our greeting sometimes took a slight variation depending on my mood, such as “I FEEL EXCEPTIONALLY BLESSED TODAY,” or VERY VERY BLESSED.”

It struck me that Nelly’s greeting is at the heart of our message today and at the heart of Thanksgiving when we are taking time to count our blessings.

When we ask one another ‘how are you doing?’ so often the response is “I’m fine.” It’s the expected response. But when Nelly answered my greeting with... I AM BLESSED, she made me stop and take a look at my relationship to gratitude in my life. Here she was at 8:00a.m. vacuuming the lobby or the hallways. Quietly, faithfully doing the work she was given, work in which she took pride, and in the simplicity

and ordinariness of her labor she responds with three words that are profoundly rooted in a theology at the heart of all the great religions of the world. Three simple words that belie a posture of self-acceptance, of self-love, of love of the other, and love of the divine. In those three words she created a posture in herself and summed up all the wisdom of the world...
I AM BLESSED,

How fortunate I was to hear this mini sermon every morning. In saying ... I AM BLESSED, Nelly taught me the message of today's Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

epistle...." Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone."

... I AM BLESSED calls us to gain perspective of where we are in relation to God and the world around us. " The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which

surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

” Her greeting, reminds us to “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

All of us know what it is to suffer. We may not see or hear as well as we used to. We come up against our limitations and finitude. We know suffering from the loss of a loved one, from loss of a job, from rejection and betrayal of friends.

The message today is that we have a choice to gain a new perspective, a posture of gratitude and to stop, **to really stop**, like I did every morning when I saw Nelly, and say to ourselves, I’m not JUST OK today, I’m not JUST FINE, I’m not just tired rather... I AM BLESSED.

... WE ARE BLESSED whether we want to recognize it or not. Everyone here , in spite of the laundry list of problems and losses and griefs we bear... ...ARE BLESSED—not because of anything we have done...but simply because God made us in God’s image.

Our awareness of our blessedness is the fruit that comes from the posture of gratitude. It is only when we can say “thank you” that we place ourselves in a posture where we can cry out... I AM BLESSED. Giving thanks for all that we have and all that is, is to recognize the blessings in our life.

So.....where do I begin to say “thank you.” I cannot name your unique places where to give thanks, but I’ll share some of mine. First, I give thanks that somehow in the crazy muddle of my life I have found St.

James' and this community of Preston. I give thank for each and every person here this night; I give thanks for my coworkers Val LaFleur, Gene Baker, and Myra Day; for my colleagues and new friends in ministry Fr. David Cannon our Vicar Emeritus, for Fr. Joe at St. Catherine's and Rev. Stan White at Preston City Congregational;

For our vestry and the ministries of outreach, member care, education, the crafters, altar guild, the fish and chips ministry, the Boy and Girl Scouts, the A&A group and Yoga group, musicians and singers and all those who provide leadership in this place.

I also give thanks for my family...for three my beautiful children, my spouse of 30 years Art Engler, for my cousin Mirek from the Czech Republic who lives with us and... for my recovery from my stroke.

On this Thanksgiving, may we choose to say thank you and place ourselves in a posture whereby we can say "I AM BLESSED" and in doing so to be a blessing to others and help them bring blessings that overflow and spill all over the lives of those we encounter in our churches, in our community and out into the greater world.

So, my friends as I began, I ask you now, HOW ARE YOU?...I AM BLESSED...Again, How are you really? I AM BLESSED...And you know what, I AM BLESSE TOO. Amen.