

## Time-Out Teddies : Blessing and Cursing

Genesis 12.1-4a, Psalm 121 (p.360), Romans 4.1-5, 13-17, John 3.1-17 See

I would like to start with 2 images. They feature teddy bears, but I would like to emphasise that I am not comparing the Lord God Almighty, Father of all, or Jesus, the crucified Christ, the Messiah and Son of God, in any way at all to a teddy bear.

What I am talking about is love and reassurance and comfort in hard times, those of our own making and those at the hands of others. I am talking about surviving, reviving, finding life and love and grace and new beginnings, and not walking that path alone.



The first teddy is sitting with a child who has transgressed in some way. Teddy did nothing wrong, but he sits with the child, sharing the consequences of the child's actions and assuring him, with his presence, that despite what went wrong in his life, he is not alone, and his beloved companion is there with him throughout this experience.

The second teddy different kind of time-out. referee and has a whistle the Exchange Club of Connecticut. He is part of children who have suffered



symbolises a He is dressed as a and the badge of Madison in their project to help abuse.

His caption reads, *Hi, my name is Time Out Teddy and I have a very important job. I remind kids and grown-ups to take time out whenever they need it. Every time you feel sad or mad, I want you to take time out to give me a hug so I can help you feel better. I'm yours forever, so I'll be here whenever you need me. Love, Time Out Teddy*

Our sentence of the day tells us that, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." John 3.16

God **so** loved the world. How so? Can you give me an adjective to finish this sentence? God's love is ..." [...]

All those adjectives should tell us something of the nature of God and the nature of God's love.

We are going to look at our readings today through the lens of God's love.

Our reading from Genesis talks about blessing. Speaking to Abraham when he was still Abram, and had not yet done as God had asked him to do, God says, "I will bless you ... and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." These promises speak of God's relationship with Abraham, and also of the consequences of the actions of other people. These consequences are not just judicial, but are also about relationships.

A few weeks ago, we looked at the Beatitudes and how blessings can be given and received in hard times as well as good times. To be blessed is to be close to God. We can know God's presence with us in good times and in hard times. This is loving relationship. Paul says in Romans 12.15 "Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn." We are called to be with others in good times and bad, to share the ups and downs of life. We cannot always change things for them, but we can be there.

Our psalm says of God, "My help comes from the Lord ... he who watches over you ... the Lord himself is your keeper, your defence ... the Lord will defend you from all evil ... it is he who will guard your life."

Paul also says in today's reading, Romans 4.1-17, that 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith ... the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace. He (Abraham) is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed.

Abram was blessed through his relationship with God, not because of the things he did. The things he did were the result of his relationship with God, not the reason for that relationship. We too can be blessed in our relationship with God, with all that that means and brings to our lives. When we turn away from God, we turn away from that blessing.

If we think of cursing as the opposite of blessing, then we can see that to be cursed is to be suffering the result of turning away from our relationship with God, to turn away from that blessing. In Genesis 3, when humanity is described as disobedient to God, there was a cursing, but God did not curse the humans. He cursed the serpent and the ground, the cause of their turning away and the resultant underpinning of how they would live. Those made from the ground would have to sustain themselves from the ground by hard work. They lost the garden and the fruits that God had given them. It was not God's choice but theirs.

When we turn away from God, we turn away from God's blessing and choose instead to suffer the consequences of not being in close relationship with God. We choose.

Deuteronomy 30. 19-20 says, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

Joshua 24.15 says, "... choose this day whom you will serve, ... the gods ... in whose land you are living[?]; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Will we serve the many gods of this world or the one true God that we know through his Son, Jesus Christ? Will we choose what is life-giving or what is life-limiting, blessing or cursing? Wherever, whatever, whoever we are, we can choose blessing, choose life, choose the one relationship in our lives that matters the most.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus talks with Nicodemus about being born again, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (John 3.14b-15) John adds, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John.16-17)

Let us revisit the prayer of the day for this second Sunday in Lent.

God of mercy,  
you are full of tenderness and compassion,  
slow to anger, rich in mercy,  
and always ready to forgive:  
grant us grace to renounce all evil and to cling to Christ,  
that in every way we may prove to be your loving children;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**