

Home is Where the Heart Is  
Luke 1:39-49

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One of my fondest childhood experiences of Christmas was traveling through the woods and down the hill to my Grandmother's house in the city. Grace was her name. Hugging was her game. When the children gathered, she would take us up in big arms, sit us on her 200lb knee and say 'BLESS YOUR HEART, MY DARLING, BLESS YOUR HEART. I'M SO PROUD TO SEE YOU. It was a Christmas blessing I still cannot live without.

At that time Mary, got ready and hurried to the hill country to visit her relative Elizabeth who was also expecting a child. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, Elizabeth in a loud voice exclaimed BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN, AND BLESSED IS THE CHILD YOU WILL BEAR. BLESSED IS SHE WHO HAS BELIEVED WHAT THE LORD HAS SAID TO HER WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED. That day Elizabeth extended a blessing to Mary that sustained her for a lifetime.

BLESS YOUR HEART. That is my Christmas present for you today. May the Lord bless you and keep you in perfect peace. That is my prayer for you today. TO BLESS is to confer well being upon another. It is to guard, protect, take pleasure in another's personhood. God wants to bless you real good today! Are you ready to receive it?

## I. A BLESSING IS A SPIRITUAL TOUCH

A. Bill Gaither said it as well as any:  
He touched me, O yes he touched me  
And oh the joy that floods my soul  
Something happened, and now I know  
God touched me, and made me whole.

1. Christmas is not argument, its announcement. Christmas does not make sense. It provides salvation. The world has taught you to be tough. Will you let the Christ child make you tender?

2. Every parent and grandparent within the sound of my voice knows God's omniscient wisdom in sending a child to change the world. I fight for

principles. I struggle with ideals, I take tough stands in my business, then my 20 month old grandson says “poppy” and all my toughness melts away.

B. Touches of a Divine Kind come in all sorts of ways.

1. Most are natural and gentle. Ron Crandal explores the nature of Christian Conversion in his book *The Contagious Witness*. After more than 10,000 interviews with persons concerning their experiences of faith, Ron reports this discovery: 24% of Christians respond personally to God’s grace as children. They never know anything other than a loving God. Another 51% personally respond to God’s touch during Adolescence. In total 75% of vital Christians today come to faith in Christ before the age of 20.

a. Sharon, my story is boring. Can’t remember the time I was not a Christian. I always enjoyed going to Church. After all these years I delight in serving the Lord.

2. Occasionally the Touch is tough, like a fight in the night.

a. So Jacob, alone at Jabbok, planning a meeting with his estranged brother, wrestles the night away. In the struggle for survival, Jacob, with his hip out of place, says to the stranger of the night I WILL NOT LET YOU GO UNLESS YOU BLESS ME. ----That night, Jacob the surplanter, trickster, the deceiving one became Israel, the blessed of all nations.

## II. A BLESSING IS A SPOKEN WORD

A. Sticks and Stones may break our bones, but words can never hurt us. Wrong! I don’t care what people say about me. Wrong again.

1. So desperate for any word that we put up with diminishing words.

2. Wes first caught the critical attention of his High School Football coach, the Coach called him a “little sissy who belonged in the band playing a piccolo.” Shared it at the dinner table--I was ready to take on a coach. NO DAD YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND. Coach noticed me today.

3. If put down pick us up, How much more will affirmations help us live.

B. Elizabeth says to Mary--Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

1. Henri Nouwen tells how residents at L’Arche Home for retarded adults ask him for the blessing. One night after He’d blessed Janet, Jane, Adam and others, John, a 24 yr. Old assistant spoke up and said WHAT ABOUT ME? He

came. I put my long robed arms around him and said. JOHN IT IS SO GOOD THAT YOU ARE HERE. YOU ARE GOD'S BELOVED SON. YOUR PRESENCE IS A JOY FOR ALL OF US. WHEN THINGS ARE HARD AND LIFE IS BURDENSOME, ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE LOVED WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE. With tears in his eyes, John said "Thank you, thank you very much.

2. Blessing is a word fitly spoken.

### III. A BLESSING IS A SPECIAL FUTURE

A. Mary Sings: From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty one has done great things for me---holy is his name.

1. Greatness comes to some people by birth. So Franklin Graham is expected to preach like Billy. George Bush follows the footsteps of his father to the white house.

2. When the Angel Gabriel visits Mary with the news of her eternal significance in God's divine plan, one peek tells him Mary is no queen. She is a Jewish peasant girl who has barely outgrown her acne and has a crush on a guy named Joe. When Gabriel tells Mary not to be afraid, he only hopes she will not notice that beneath those great golden wings, he himself is trembling with fear, to think that the whole future of creation now hangs now on the answer of a young girl.

B. Are you living above the level of necessity?

1. Max Lucado tells the story of newlyweds who arrive at their hotel in the wee hours with high hopes. They have reserved a large room with romantic amenities. THAT'S NOT WHAT THEY FOUND. Seems the room was pretty skimpy, no view, no flowers, cramped bathroom, worst of all no bed--just a fold out sofa. The next morning the sore necked groom storms down to the manager and complains. The manager listens a moment then asks DID YOU OPEN THE DOOR TO THE NEXT ROOM? I thought it was a closet admitted the groom. The couple had reserved suite and spent the night in the sitting room.

2. Are you just getting by?

a. convictions to change the world, downgraded now to commitments to pay the bills.

b. Rather than make a difference,--make a living.

c. Enjoy a family--trying to get by.

d. Looking forward--looking out

IV. A BLESSING IS SUSTAINING PRESENCE and the angel said to Mary, The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of the most high will overshadow you.

A. A Church member wrote this letter to his pastor: Dear Sir, It seems you ministers think sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I've been attending Church for 30 years and have probably heard 3000 a sermons. I can honestly say I don't remember a single one of them. I wonder if your time might be better spent doing something else.

1. Dear Sir, Over the last 50 years I have eaten about 54,000 meals. I must say I do not remember the complete menu of a single meal. And yet I have the distinct impression that I would have starved to death long ago without them. See you in Church on Sunday.

B. I had a student once, writes Henri Nouwen, who was never able to hear a single word I said. His broken relationship with his father alienated him from every male voice. Once when he was sick, I was biking near where he lived. I decided to drop in. "I've been thinking about you today" I said "Are you feeling better?" ---

1. After a stunned silence the student said "You came to see me. You thought of me. I reached out and touched him. Says Nouwen, put my hand on his hand and said "I love you, I really do. That's why I am here." Later he told me he'd cried several hours after I left. He had never heard an adult male say "I love you."

Bless your heart. Will you let God bless you and keep you this Christmas? Somebody said we scatter our hearts along the road of life. We leave parts of us here and other parts there. Before we know it, we feel fragmented and torn. People in my extended family didn't like Grandma Grace very much. They wanted to judge her by all the men she'd loved before. Of course they were right. ---except that she provided in that annual blessing more genuine love than all the rest of my rigid family could ever share.

Bless your heart. As a priest of God, a messenger of the gospel, I want to extend God's blessing to you right now. I want you to go home a Blessed Child of God. During this time of reflection, I invite you to these chancel rails. At this meeting place with God, one of our ministers will extend God's blessings to you. Let whole families gather. Let individuals come. Let your hearts be richly blessed this Christmas. Come quickly. Come.