

With blessing comes responsibility

Message for Sunday, July 1, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Psalm 24:1; 1 Chronicles 29:14-15;
Matthew 5:13-16

Children's Message:

A thermostat sets the temperature in a room or a building. In the winter, this room is nice and cool. Maybe *too* cool for some. So the thermostat kicks in and brings the temperature up to where it's more comfortable.

A thermometer, on the other hands, just tells what the temperature is.

A thermostat and thermometer both begin the same way: by finding out what the temperature is. The thermostat goes further: if the temperature is not where it should be, it goes into action to bring the temperature back where it's supposed to be.

People can be like that. Some people just go along with whatever is happening around them. They are like thermometers. If they are with a group which is teasing and saying nasty things about another person, thermometer people will join in and be just like the rest.

Thermostat people aren't like that. When they are in the middle of something that is not right, they do what they can to change it. Instead of joining in calling names, a thermostat person would turn and say to his or her friends, "That's not right; stop that." The thermostat person will even go over and stand with the person being teased, to be their friend, too.

The idea for this comes from the example Jesus gave. Only he didn't talk about thermostats. He talked about salt and meat.

Matthew 5:13, New Living Translation:

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless."

Thanks to Harvey and Patsie Moore for this idea, in their book *The Droopy Flower Mystery*

Message: "With blessing comes responsibility"

1) Our democracy and freedom are remarkable

When I was in my teens, I was part of an organization called Saskatchewan Youth Parliament (very similar to Ontario Youth Parliament). We got together a few weekends in the year to hold a "mini-parliament" in towns around the province. Then during the week between Christmas and New Year's, we took over the Provincial Legislature. We'd divide into government and opposition, and debate various topics - most of them the serious issues of the day, and some just wacky ideas for fun. All in all, it was good training in how our parliamentary system works.

It must have been quite good training, because one of our members, Gordon Barnhart, was hired as the Clerk of the Legislature at the age of 24, entirely because of those years of experience in parliamentary procedure. (The Clerk is the permanent expert in rules and procedures, who advises the Speaker when things get too chaotic.)

In 1984, Saskatchewan hosted a conference of representatives from parliaments all over the world. Gordon, of course, was deeply involved in all of the arrangements, including hosting some of the delegates at his home. After the meeting was over, Gordon was relaxing at home with a delegate from Africa, who was staying in Canada for a few extra days. It was right at the time when Brian Mulroney was being sworn in as Canada's new Prime Minister, taking over from John Turner, and they were watching it on television.

There was a great deal of pomp and pageantry involved as the ceremony went on. After a while, Gordon noticed that his guest was sitting on the edge of his seat, breathing quickly, and visibly trembling. Gordon asked him if anything was the matter. The delegate from Africa replied, "When do they start shooting?"

It turned out that he had never seen anything like this. Even though he came from a country whose constitution talks about democracy, he had never witnessed a peaceful transition of power. His experience was that governments were changed only by military force, and that the new government immediately killed any opposition. He was utterly

astonished to witness a peaceful transition of power. If he had not seen it himself, he would never have believed it.

We take elections and voting and parliament for granted. We shouldn't. It is truly remarkable.

2) Are we lucky to be Canadians?

Here is something else to consider about the country we live in. Imagine that we shrank the world's seven and a half billion population down to a village of 100 people. In that village, there would be

- 60 Asians
- 16 Africans.
- 10 Europeans
- 14 from North, South and Central America

These are approximations, of course. Taking the figures strictly, Canada would be represented by half of one person.

Further, of those 100 villagers,

- male and female would be split 50-50
- 70 would be darker skinned; 30 would be white
- 69 would be non-Christian; 31 would be Christian
- 6 would possess 59 percent of the entire village's wealth (and most of them would be American)
- 76 would have electricity; 40 would have internet
- 80 would live in substandard housing; 20 would not have clean, safe water to drink
- 22 would be overweight; 30 would have reliable food supply; 50 would not have reliable food supply and would often be hungry; 11 would be malnourished; 1 would be dying of starvation.

If you woke up this morning, you are blessed. A million people will not survive this week. (If you didn't wake up this morning, what are you doing here?)

If you have never had to live through a war, or been imprisoned, or suffered torture, or starved, you're more fortunate than 500 million other people around the world.

If you can attend a church meeting or a political rally without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are luckier than three billion people.

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep—no matter how humble—you are better off than 75 percent of the world's population.

If you have money in the bank, cash in your wallet, and spare change in a jar someplace, you are fabulously wealthy—among the top eight percent of the world's people.

If you can read this, you are exceptional. About four billion people are functionally illiterate; of those, about two billion cannot read at all.

Here's the question: why were you and I allowed to be born here or move here, yet billions of other people were born into circumstances that virtually guarantee them a life of poverty and hardship? I've often wondered about this, and to date have not found the answer.

Some may suggest it's just a case of luck—"some win, some lose." That belief is based on the assumption that the "winners" (i.e. we Canadians) won a prize, and it's ours to keep. That kind of thinking leads to wanting to close Canada's borders to more immigration (to keep the "losers" out). God's word tells us who the land really belongs to:

Psalm 24:1, New International Version:

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

David, when he was king over a prosperous nation, and he himself was fabulously wealthy, prayed about a gift that he and the people were making to God:

1 Chronicles 29:14-15, New International Version:

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you have already given us!"

They didn't waste time looking for answers to questions which can never be answered, like my "Why?" question. Instead, King David and the

people just gave thanks to God for their blessings, and used them as wise stewards.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, answered that question this way: “Earn all you can; save all you can; give all you can.” Instead of philosophizing about imponderable questions, Wesley says, “Just do it. You know what you’re supposed to do, so do it.”

3) Salt and Light for the nation

Keeping in mind that idea of working with others... we are already part of a group with others: the Church of Jesus Christ here and around the world!

John Stott, a leader of the Anglican Church in Great Britain, said this during a speaking engagement in the United States.

You know what your own country is like. I’m a visitor, and I wouldn’t presume to speak about America. But I know what Great Britain is like. I know something about the growing dishonesty, corruption, immorality, violence, pornography, the diminishing respect for human life, and the increase in abortion.

Whose fault is it? Let me put it like this: if the house is dark at night, there is no sense in blaming the house. That’s what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, “Where is the light?”

If meat goes bad, there is no sense in blaming the meat. That is what happens when the bacteria are allowed to breed unchecked. The question to ask is, “Where is the salt?”

If society becomes corrupt like a dark night or stinking fish, there’s no sense in blaming society. That’s what happens when fallen human society is left to itself and human evil is unrestrained and unchecked. The question to ask is “Where is the church?”

Stott was referring to what Jesus said:

Matthew 5:13-16, New Living Translation:
[Jesus said,] “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavour? Can you make it useful again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. Don’t hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to

see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

To summarize:

- We live in a great country. We are truly blessed.
- The purpose of a blessing is not to hoard it (like winners and losers), but to use it to bless others.
- As followers of Jesus, we are salt and light for the world around us. We are not spectators in our own country; we have a role to play.

Next Steps:

There are lots of other ways we can share our blessings with others, beyond giving to people in need:

- Get to know the aboriginal people in this region. There are first nation communities in Tyendinaga and Alderville, both less than an hour from here.
- You can tell Mike Bossio that you think Canada can do more to help other nations.
- You can pray for other nations, and as well pray for God to change your own heart and attitude.
- You can join a group like Amnesty International, Gospel For Asia, Canadian Landmine Foundation, Stephen Lewis AIDS Foundation—a group with a concern for people in other nations of the world, which matches your passion for helping others. Being part of a group is important; with others, we can do things which by ourselves would be impossible.