

I feel like I should begin my sermon this morning by saying that there is not, in fact, a typo in the sermon title. It is, believe it or not, supposed to say “#Blessed.”

For those who are uninitiated in the world of Social Media...of Facebook...of Twitter...of Instagram, a hashtag is another name for that pound sign before the word blessed.

What this does is that it allows people posting either pictures or statements or stories to add a hashtag at the end. It's usually done as a way to add something different to the post, sometime informative and sometimes humorous.

Here's an example for you of how they can be used: I could say, “Whenever the sun comes out, I always have to worry about getting sunburn.” Now that's a pretty bland statement, but you can use a hashtag to make it better or to drive home the point.

So I might say instead, “Whenever the sun comes out, I always have to worry about getting sunburn. #so pale #whiter than a ghost #my skin will blind you it's so white #I wish I was kidding #aloe season.” I think you get the idea now.

What makes hashtags even better is that on most social media platforms, you can click on a hashtag, and it'll bring up all the publicly posted things that share that same hashtag.

I like to do this from time-to-time to see what other people out in the world are posting and talking about.

One very popular hashtag that is used an awful lot is, you guessed it, “#Blessed.” It's fascinating to click on that particular hashtag to see what all people believe has happened so that they have been blessed by God.

Here are a few examples I found.

One I saw on Twitter said this, “Out driving and I just got four green lights in a row without having to stop. #blessed.”

Another one said, “Just purchased a new couch and it can charge my iPhone. #blessed.”

Now not all of them are silly, I promise.

One Facebook friend of mine had a picture from a day spent at the lake on a boat. Her post read, “Every sunset brings the promise of a new dawn. #sunsets #LakeMarion #blessed.”

Another had just graduated from grad school and said, “All the glory goes to God for bringing me this far. #blessed”

Another still said, “Home feels amazing. #blessed.”

It was fascinating for me to take a deep dive into social media this week to see what all we, as humans, are thankful for and what we believe that God has blessed us with.

It’s been especially interesting in light of me studying our Old Testament story of Abram and Sarai, or Abraham and Sarah as they would become known.

Five times in these four verses, a variation of the word blessing is used. “I will bless you...so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” I’m sensing a theme here, how about you?

I can just see the social media post from Abraham now: “God just made of me a great nation and has made my name great! #blessed.” Seems kind of strange when we put it that way, huh?

The common underlying theme of my examples earlier were all about feeling blessed because things felt right or things went their way or they were things that made them just feel happy. Those blessings were based on personal contentment.

But let’s contrast that with what a blessing looks like from our text. Abraham and Sarah are asked to leave their own country, leave their family, and leave their father’s house and all the benefits that came with it.

I’m sure Abraham didn’t feel particularly blessed when he was asked to go to a land he did not know by a God who not too many seemed to follow.

That doesn’t sound too much like a blessing to me. But that’s precisely what it is. A blessing.

But It’s not just a blessing because God promises to make Abraham’s name great...  
It’s not just a blessing because Abraham will be the father of a great nation...  
It’s not just a blessing because it personally benefits Abraham...

It’s a blessing because Abraham and Sarah become blessings themselves. God says in verse 2, “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.” Verse 3 says, “in *you* all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Friends, this is what it means to be blessed: to be a blessing to others.

I’m sure there are countless things that each and every one of us are grateful for and that we count as blessings. And those are things to be cherished. Whether it’s family, or a job, or a roof over your head, or just another day on this earth.

Be grateful for those things.

Thank God for those things.

But don't be fooled into thinking they are blessings meant just for you.

God tells Abraham and Sarah, "I will bless you, so that *you* will be a blessing."

And guess what?

God is telling you and God is telling me, "I will bless you, so that *you* will be a blessing."

One of my old pastors back home told a story once about a man who was not supposed to be alive, but he was. And not only was he alive, he was actively living his life...against all odds.

This man's son-in-law was a Presbyterian minister, whose name was Steve. Now I'm not sure if you know this or not, but I'm starting to learn it myself: Presbyterian pastors talk to each other and we share with each other, so I know his story has been told countless times as a sermon illustration by many Presbyterian pastors before me. If you've heard it before, that's OK. It's worth hearing again.

The man that we're talking about in this story is named Leo. Leo Braccionier. Now Steve, the Presbyterian minister, and his wife Rene were celebrating their 24<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and had invited his in-laws, who were visiting from Pennsylvania, to be a part of their dinner out together.

When it came time for dinner, the four of them walked out Steve's front door, took a left and walked half a mile up the street to the front door of their favorite restaurant, "ETs."

As the hostess showed them their table, it was then that Steve realized the magnitude of what his father-in-law Leo had just done. He thought, "Did Leo just walk half a mile up a steep incline without anybody's help? Was this the same man who, two years before, was stuck in a bed at the hospital? Was this the same man whose heart was slowly giving out on him?"

Well, it was...but it wasn't. He was still Leo, but he really wasn't the same man. Because on September 17, 1995, in the Hannahman Hospital in Philadelphia, Leo received a new heart.

September 17, according to Leo Braccionier, is his new birthday. How many times had the family said their goodbyes to him, as they were not sure that his old heart could be revived yet again.

But there he was, two years later, sitting in "ETs" laughing and joking, having taken a walk that would have been impossible before. He was not supposed to be here, but he was. For he had been given a new lease on life. A new heart made all the difference in the world.

When he came home with his new heart, he wrote to the family where donation came from. He doesn't know the family, because they kept it confidential, so he wrote his letter to the hospital, who forwarded it to the family.

And after one year, on his first birthday, you might say, he wrote them again, telling them how he's taking care of the heart and what he's using it for.

He tells them that he has taken up aerobics, and that he is exercising three days a week.

He tells them that he is using his new heart to help out with Alzheimer's patients at a local nursing home. He couldn't have done that, he says, without his new heart. He also tells the donor family that he is using his new heart to help coordinate a Senior Adult group at his church, which brings joy to more hearts than his own.

And whenever he can, he says he runs errands for the church secretary.

He is so busy exercising and finding new uses for this new heart of his, he hasn't even found time to be on the golf course lately. But he delights in knowing that he could play if he had the time.

Leo keeps in touch with the donor family because he feels a certain accountability to them. He would not have this heart without their act of grace, and he knows that this act of grace was expressed in a time of great sadness.

Leo knows very well that someone had to die for someone to get this heart...Leo knows that it did not come without significant suffering and pain and sacrifice...and so he feels obligated to care for it, to use it wisely, to use it well.

Leo knew that he was blessed, and so he became a blessing for others.

I don't know about y'all, but when I hear this story I am not only inspired by his response to his blessing, but I am also floored by the impossible becoming possible. Leo received a new heart. That is unfathomable to me. That one can physically receive a new heart and be given a new lease on life.

I looked it up, and the first successful heart transplant took place in 1967 in Cape Town, South Africa. We've had over 50 years to accept that it is possible, and it has now become so commonplace that around 2,000 heart transplants take place in America each year.

That's incredible to me, even in a world where most people meet that information with a shrug and a nod of the head.

It reminds me, though, that something seemingly impossible has been made possible.

And it reminds me of the way God chooses to work and the people from our story from Genesis that God chose to be the father and mother of our ancestral faith.

God chose Abraham and God chose Sarah...the same Sarah who was unable to have children - a barren woman became the mother of our faith.

Isn't that just like God? To take something seemingly impossible and to make it possible.

God chose to meet Abraham and Sarah where they were, imperfect as they were, ill-prepared as they were, unsure as they were...and God chose to bless them.

Not so their lives would be the only ones that would be blessed, but so that they could become blessings for others.

And the good news this morning is this: God chooses to meet each and every one of us where we are, imperfect as we are, ill-prepared as we are, unsure as we are...and God chooses to bless us.

Not so that our lives would be the only ones that would be blessed, but so that we would become blessings for others.

So I leave you with these two questions: Are we #Blessed? You bet we are. God has made sure of that.

But have we become a blessing ourselves? Well that's up to you. And me.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.