

At the beginning of Genesis, after creating night and day, the oceans and the land, God fills the waters and the sky with living creatures, calling them into life, that they be fruitful and multiply, and God blesses them. God creates humans, calls them into life, and blesses them, that human beings might be fruitful and multiply.

God's blessing, from the beginning, is bound up with life, life as God intended, a blessed Creation in communion, that it be fruitful, that life might beget life. And blessing is an intrinsic part of our life in Christ, as it is for our cousins in faith, in Judaism and Islam – we all pray for God's blessing, we all bless God, we bless our food, our homes, we bless one another. Blessing connects us all back to the very beginning of the human story and God's first blessings as the life of Creation is brought into being.

Blessed we may be, but human beings are also complicated.

The human person is extraordinary, we're curious and inquisitive, we notice and question and constantly wonder about and challenge what we know of the world around us. The human brain is a marvel, it processes and filters staggering amounts of information, most of which we're not even consciously aware of. Given all that we are, we are truly blessed, surely, because we can perceive and receive the full glory of Creation, we can experience it, delight in it, and glorify God for it – and the wisdom of the Creation story in Genesis seems to say that it's for this, to do this, that we were created.

We delight in Creation, in its sights, sounds, fragrances, we can feel great joy when we're immersed in it, and there's wonder, and there's awe. And each one of us is, unquestionably, an essential part of this remarkable network of life, in all its fabulous glory, and uncontainable diversity. What a blessing it is!

A blessing it may be, but human beings are also complicated. We don't only notice the beautiful, we don't only pay attention to the good and the marvelous and the true, our human-ness lets it *all* in, exposes us to it all ... and that's where things get complicated.

Last week, in church, we were in the story of Adam and Eve, those first two humans who listened to the crafty voice of the serpent, and acted on its very bad advice, and found themselves in a very bad place with God. They weren't prepared for the crafty voice, they didn't expect to be led astray by anyone or anything in God's good Creation, so these first two humans weren't equipped with any practice or habit of returning to God for guidance before acting – and the consequences of that were very bad indeed.

In today's reading, from a little further on in the book of Genesis, Abram does listen to God. God said "go" and Abram went, just "as the LORD had told him." Abram must have been really good at paying attention to the presence and guidance of God and must have really understood and believed in his bones that without God, there cannot be fullness of life; if there were crafty voices trying to talk Abram out of his obedient response to God, Abram was undeterred. And Abram is told that he will be blessed and that he, in turn will be a blessing.

Abram will eventually become Abraham, and Abraham will become the Patriarch of three of the world's most followed religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And these cousin faiths, these wisdom traditions, these ways of living a God-centered life have been a great blessing to countless millions ... and they've also been the banner under which unspeakably bad things have been done in the world. There has been colossal suffering and loss of life in their name, and countless battles and wars have been fought - are still being fought, today are being fought; Creation is being destroyed and lives are being lost.

Members of these cousin faiths may know that God created and blessed humankind but way too many followers of the Abrahamic faiths don't live as though all humanity is blessed by God, that their cousins, too, are blessed by God. They/we don't live as though we've have been called into life by and for God. Too many followers of the Abrahamic faiths do not live as though nothing is more important, more critical, than our love of God and our love for all of God's Creation, and its life, nothing is more important than life and God's desire and delight in the life and beauty of Creation.

Unlike Adam and Eve, we do know better, we know there are crafty voices at work in the world, ready to convince us that violence is the way to freedom, that destruction and killing is the way to peace. We know better than to believe that domination and fear can ever be the way to mutuality or unity. And if we ever find ourselves unsure, we have thousands of years of teachings, and spiritual practices, tested through the generations, ways we can trust to return to God, turn first to the Creator, the giver of all Life, *before* we act, before we break the rules we've been given.

So what are we to do in times such as these? What are we to do when we witness, still, the violence, the destruction, the suffering, the constant ending of life.

Perhaps in a world that so often seems to have forgotten that all life is of God, perhaps in a world such as this – we bless. And with our blessings we give voice to the truth that God is in and through all of life, creating it still and sustaining it always.

Speaking words of blessing puts God's desire for Creation, puts life, life that is fruitful, life that begets life (not ends it), puts this truth into our mouths; speaking words of blessing fixes this truth in our minds, and keeps this truth in our hearts - and our words of blessing will flow out for good into the world around us.

Perhaps we should bless, and bless without ceasing, bless the goodness of God's Creation, bless the lives of those we share this world with, so that we, too, might be a blessing to others and to the world we live in.

We can't simply choose to stop war, we can't miraculously fix every injustice, we can't silence every crafty, tempting voice.

But we can bless, and as we bless we can fix our attention, we can train our attention on the sanctity of life and the very real presence and life-giving movement of God in the world.

We can bless, we can bless the people we share this world with, we can bless the earth that's home for all of us, we can bless our cousins in faith. We can bless those who are tirelessly working for peace.

And we can bless those who have been drawn in by the crafty voices and have set God's law to one side, and now see war as the way, we can bless these folks not as an affirmation of their actions, but as our refusal to be drawn into hate, and as our longing for their change of heart - with our blessing we're calling these fellow humans back into fullness of life, into communion with God and all of Creation, knowing that anything is possible with God, knowing that true transformation is possible within the circle of Christ's love.

We can bless the leaders of this world that they too may come, one day, to bless life, and themselves be a blessing to this world.

Perhaps our most powerful response to the destruction of war is an unrelenting commitment to *speaking words of life*. This is not naïve optimism, nor is it a denial of the very real suffering being endured in the world or of the world's complexity; it's a firm and definitive act of defiance, and one that's central to our Christian faith – our words of blessing are a spoken insistence that within God's good Creation, death will never have the last word. Amen.