

Kirby Lawrence Hill

Abington Presbyterian Church

Isaiah 12:2-6

Matthew 6:25-33

November 20, 2022

## WHAT JESUS REJECTS AND EMBRACES: RELIANCE UPON WHOM?

Lake Wobegon was an imaginary place that greatly resembled small town Minnesota that Garrison Keillor has described in his storytelling. In one of his vignettes, he shared that car ownership in Lake Wobegon was a matter of faith. He had noticed that Lutherans drove Fords, bought from Bunson Motors, the Lutheran car dealer. Catholics drove Chevrolets from Main Garage, owned by the Kruegers, who were Catholic. Keillor's own people, the Brethren, also drove Fords, but distinguished themselves from the Lutherans by attaching small scripture plates to the top of their license plates. But of note from among the Church of the Brethren people was Brother Louie, whose four-door Fairlane not only displayed scripture passages on the license plates and elsewhere inside the car, but was topped off by the car horn. Louie had found a company in Indiana that advertised custom-made musical car horns. Louie's horn played the first eight notes of the doxology. It sounded like a trumpet. He blew it at pedestrians, at oncoming traffic, while passing, and sometimes just for his own pleasure. "On occasion, vexed by a fellow driver, he gave in to wrath and leaned on the horn, only to hear 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.' It calmed him down right away."<sup>1</sup>

I have to admit, such a horn is not quite my style. But maybe a ringtone on my phone with those eight notes would be a good reminder that there is One from whom all blessings flow, and that One isn't you or me. We might fall into the trap telling ourselves that we worked hard for what we have and we don't need to be grateful to anyone else. By all indications, Jesus worked hard, putting in long days stretching into evenings of meeting with folks who needed physical or emotional healing or spiritual guidance. But Jesus knew upon whom to rely. He pointed to birds that God provided for, and to flowers that were adorned beautifully as a way to show that we humans also have a God who provides what we need. And if we work hard, then it would make sense to realize that the energy and even the desire

to work hard is a gift that we cannot just conjure up on our own. Perhaps we studied hard to get our degrees and certifications for particular vocational positions, however, we did not form our own brains, we did not create our own creativity. Perhaps all of us need an occasional blaring reminder: “praise God from whom all blessings flow!”

We hear Jesus in the portion of the sermon on the mount included in our gospel text today turning to nature to discern a bit more about the One who created all there is. We could add to that in recognizing that we have a God who does not sit around calculating what might be just the minimum that could be provided, not settling just for the minimum amount of oxygen to provide so earth’s creatures could stay just above the level of asphyxiation. Instead, we can breathe easy, because God isn’t like that. In addition, God does not hold back from being in relationship with us or enabling us to have positive relationships with one another. There is no lack of provided meaning or hope or love that comes our way from heaven. God does not just provide the smallest amount of food where we can eke out only a subsistence level of protein and calories. There is more than enough food for everyone, if we would just be better about sharing and distribution. For many of us, we can recognize that we have a reliable God, so we can, by God’s grace, move from anxiety toward awe; we can move from worry toward wonder.

Even with all of his gifts and powers, Jesus rejected relying just upon himself. He is described as getting up early in the morning or staying up overnight in order to pray. He knew the One from whom all blessings flow. One of the oldest and most sacred traditions of our Jewish neighbors is based on the ancient prayer of David, in 1 Chronicles 29: “Blessed are you, O Lord.” The Hebrew is easy: “Baruch atah Adonai” – “Blessed are you, O Lord.” The ancient Jewish custom is perfect for Thanksgiving week. The faithful are encouraged to pray the prayer 100 times daily, all day long: “Baruch atah Adonai” and then fill in the blanks with the good stuff of life and the world as we encounter it. <sup>2</sup>

- Baruch atah Adonai, blessed are you, O Lord, for the sun coming up over the horizon and reasons to get up along with it.

- Baruch atah Adonai, blessed are you, O Lord, for an ability to think clearly, the energy to be up and about, some freedom to decide how we can use the time or other resources placed in our care, and rest at the end of the day.
- Baruch atah Adonai, blessed are you, O Lord, for memories we cherish and opportunities for learning and growth each and every day.
- Baruch atah Adonai, blessed are you, O Lord, for freedom of religion, assembly, and speech, along with abilities to travel and explore.
- Baruch atah Adonai, blessed are you, O Lord, for experiences of welcome, forgiveness, love, and a sense of community.
- Baruch atah Adonai, blessed are you, O Lord, for our basic needs having been met along with opportunities to assist others in need.
- Baruch atah Adonai, blessed are you, O Lord, for a sense of purpose we've been given, with some principles and Someone worth believing in.

That is a spiritual exercise from which many of us would benefit. However, there are people who have suffered such loss and carry such burdens that I don't want to add the additional burden of a shaming statement that even in great loss, they must be manufacturing and expressing gratitude out of nothingness. No, there are times that they should just be comforted instead. And if they experience some comfort or resurrection hope, then I hope later on that they might be grateful for that.

But for many of us, we do well to remember the eight notes in our heads and hearts that remind us to praise God from whom all blessings flow. God is the source of all blessings. And they don't just trickle – they flow. Jesus embraced a life recognizing the One on whom he could rely and expressing gratitude to God along the way, and he didn't have to have a car horn to remind him that this is a glorious way to live. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

<sup>1</sup> Garrison Keillor, Lake Wobegon Days, Penguin, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Marva Dawn, A Royal Waste of Time, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 210



