

Well good morning St. John's. thank you Lord for being present with us this morning. May we bless one another in all that we say and do.

*I know this is unusual but I am still struggling with what to give up for Lent*

Blessing. We use that word rather flippantly these days; at least I do. 'What a blessing!' 'Oh you are so blessed!' Do we really stop to consider the magnitude of what we are talking about. When God blesses us it is not something to take lightly. When Sarai and Abram were blessed with the promise of descendants, I am pretty sure Sarai's first comment was 'oh I am so blessed' As a matter of fact it wasn't even close. To describe her reaction in a contemporary context she was LOL!! But this blessing was so grand that Yahweh gave Abram and Sarai a totally new identity. He changed their names. This changed the essence of who they were. In living out this

blessing they took on a new identity. They lived their lives for God. However what did not happen as a result of this blessing from God was for their lives to be perfect. Sarai and Abram renamed is an example about how everything changes when one follows God. And part of being blessed means that you will bless others. When we bless others we offer a glimpse into God through who we are.

What does it mean to be blessed and how do we respond to God's blessings? I think these are the basic questions that our Gospel this morning asks. Somehow we have come as a Christian community to assume that being blessed means that everything is rosy. We deny real feelings of loss or anger or depression and dismiss it with the quip 'oh but I am so blessed.' But maybe the loss, anger, or depression is part of the blessing. Jesus makes it quite clear to Peter when Peter refuses to accept Jesus journey of suffering. Being blessed I think means realizing

and living out who and what God created us to be. In that being we have to embrace the total spectrum of life. The key is how we respond to the blessing of God. This is where we 'take up the cross' Taking up the cross is not about carrying our burdens it is about taking on the identity of a blessed child of God first and foremost in our life.

We tend to think of denial as giving up part of our authentic selves rather than becoming our authentic selves. By authentic I mean who God created us to be. When we take up our cross we accept our blessing and we take on a new identity. This does not mean we lose who we were before; it means that when we see ourselves, we see ourselves as belonging to God first and then as we are identified by family, profession, or nationality. By taking up the cross we accept God's commitment and love for humanity. By taking up the cross we become part of something greater than ourselves. We are

disciples. The “theology of the cross” or “to deny oneself” does not mean figuring out how many ways we can be humble. It does not honor Jesus to demean ourselves. It is our call to do the very best we can with all the talents and abilities given to us by God. “denying oneself” means to keep our priorities in harmony with what Jesus told us in the two “great commandments” -- love God and love your neighbor (Mark 12:28-31).

Lent reminds us that we are connected to one another through a story. God’s story. It places us right in the middle of that story and it is impossible to think of ourselves without thinking of what Jesus did for us and how the community of faith is artfully woven together in the fullest sense of blessing. Jesus story, all of it is the icon of blessing. So when you thank God for your blessings perhaps you will also ask for the courage to bless others. We are the embodiment of the

generational blessing of Abraham and Sarah. And the  
embodiment of the story of the cross.