



From the Senior Pastor's Desk
July 2017

REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM AND BE
THANKFUL:
YOU ARE A BELOVED CHILD OF
GOD, PRECIOUS AND BEAUTIFUL TO
BEHOLD!

What a difference it makes in how we translate:

“*Blessing*”

or

“*Reward*”

Father's Day has become a holy time for me – when my children and I enjoy each other's company (even when necessity compels that presence to be limited to the sound of voice through electronics, over hundreds of miles.)

I hope my children *enjoy* the experience as much as I do. I hope their participation is not bound up in a sense of *duty*. There is absolutely nothing they could do, or not do, that will change how much I love them. I just enjoy their company. I hope they know that. (And, I think, if a sinful father such as me feels that way, how much more so does God.)

But, perhaps, that is not how it works. Perhaps, in the spring and summer of life we do things out of duty, and later, in the autumn and winter, we simply enjoy the *blessing* of shared company. No *rewards* being sought for doing it right, just the *blessing* of being together.

I hope that our faith develops in the same way – so that we get to the point in our relationship with God that we no longer feel

a need to perform, to get the *reward* – but we can just enjoy the *blessing* of our shared experience. That we can simply rest in God’s presence, that is present in every moment, in every breath.

After Tommy Ong’s recent funeral – a remarkable celebration of a life ended too young and of God’s love that never ends – a friend of Tommy’s father sat in my car with me for a spell. He was an older man. I said to him that the abrupt termination of this well-lived life demonstrates the importance of (1) *all is fragile*, (2) *there are not guarantees*, (3) *all is gift*, and (4) *we need to give thanks and share*.

My older companion nodded his head, and then added: “*And we must obey.*”

It came to my ears, not as a slap in the face, but as a genuine affirmation of faith – *his* faith -- of the cornerstone of a good relationship with God. It’s about *obedience*. He translates it as “*reward.*”

I am at a point in my life where I try to not be critical, but to merely show what I believe is a better way.

What a difference it makes in our living if we translate “*reward*” or “*blessing.*”

I am glad I grew up in an environment of rules being lovingly taught – to form my character. This in the spring time of my life.

I am also glad that my life has moved along to where I now live in the *blessing of relationship* and not in the *reward of obedience*.

The *blessing* opens all my senses to constantly experiencing more upon more blessings each day.

The *rewards* model tends to make me be always *on edge*, fearing I am not doing good enough.

The *blessing* mindset also tends my mind toward looking for the blessing that each person brings. A *reward* mindset tends to make me always evaluating others, to see if they are living up to the mark.

What a difference it makes in how we translate “*blessing*” or “*reward*.”

May your summer in 2017 be blessed.

L’Chiam!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Monty".

Sheepdog for the Shepherd