

Message: “Blessings & Burdens”

Today, I’m sharing with you a story of God’s blessings and our burdens from our missionary, Mozart Adevu. Regina Ntosour is a 62-year old female from the village of Osramanae, which is in the Krachi West district of the Oti region of Ghana. Mrs. Ntosour is one of several female farmers making great strides in her community. She briefly shares her story of transformation as follows:

“After the training in nutrition and soap making organized by UMCOR-SA&D (Sustainable Agriculture & Development) about 8 years ago, I started preparing soy kebab which I have been selling in the schools and to the fishermen along the banks of the Volta Lake. The income derived from this has helped me to cater for my grandchildren after they lost their mother, besides this it's also helping me to buy my personal needs for my home. I also have been able to save some money and started soap making and all these efforts attributed to UMCOR’s support for our community have taken me away from extreme poverty and have virtually made me a ‘new person’ of respect in my community.”¹

You’re part of God’s plan to change lives in Africa for the better when you give out of your generosity. That’s our “Why” as our lay leader Brian Park said so well last Sunday.

Today’s message is a little different. Audience participation is encouraged. Let’s reflect on what God has been doing in, with and through our congregation over the past three years. Specifically, there are ways we’ve done good in the community ... and you may not have realized it. Positivity is good, but let’s make sure we’re grounded in reality as we reflect.

There are two aspects to focus on. Our Scripture readings for today, Abram’s call and Paul’s encouragement to a group in Galatia, speak to the theme: blessings and burdens. Three years ago, I spoke about God’s blessings in my very first sermon, looking at the same passage from Genesis 12. We discovered that God doesn’t make threats to get humans to respond to God’s blessings. God makes promises and shows us the benefits. It’s up to us to join in or remain isolated. The journey Abram,

¹ Mozart Adevu, April 2019 newsletter, Global Ministries Missionary

Sarai and their family took was a burden. It wasn't easy, but God kept God's promises. The promises God made to Abram and Sarai and the same promises God makes to us today!

God makes five promises and two predictions to Abram.

The five promises are:

- *“I will make you a great nation”* – strange and wonderful as Abram and Sarah had no children and were 60 and 75! How might God be promising us the gift of children and youth?
- *“I will bless you”* – God promised them a place and a future. What more can we wish for than Almighty God to care for us?
- *“I will make your name great”* – power, authority and a good reputation came when Abram followed God. The same will be true for us when we act out of love and generosity in Jesus' name.
- *“I will bless those who bless you”* – God is a friend to our friends.
- *“I will curse those who curse you”* – those who seek to do harm will find God opposing them.

God's two predictions are:

- *“You will be a blessing”* – God's blessings are most active and powerful when we pass them on. Let's not try to hold onto or hoard God's blessings, more are available if we empty ourselves.
- *“All peoples will be blessed because of you”* – blessings pass through us to other people, regardless of our differences. It doesn't matter whether we speak different languages, dress differently, look differently, live differently or even see the world differently, God's love knows no bounds and limits.

Now it's your turn.

How has God blessed you in the past year or two?

I invite you to reflect on the blessings you have received.

Let's change the question.

How have you been able to share God's blessing this year?

Take a couple of minutes to reflect.

I asked our church leaders to share a few blessings. Here are a few things we're thankful for ...

A Few of God’s Blessings to Corona UMC

New Members

- 2016-19: 52 and counting (12+ by professing faith)
- 2018 – 11, mostly parents (17 including children)
- 2019 – 7 so far with others coming
includes 5 youth confirmed on Easter Sunday

Babies born & Baptisms (Ava Murphy, Bryant Wy, Luke Price)

- Carolyn Cuatt – Loni’s second child on the way!
- Jonathan Cords – Allison’s second child on the way!
- Carhyssa Gamboa – baptism on July 21st
- Atkinsons’ due soon

Weddings & Anniversaries

- Sammy & Philip Smitley
- Michael & Lacey Rogers, my nephew
- 50th anniversary: Nelsons, Parks, McGranahans, Faxons

Children & Youth Ministry

- Wonderful teachers & leaders – thanks to Katie
 - Each month we are blessed to have children & youth attend:
Pre-K/Kinder – 17 avg 1st-3rd – 11 avg
4-6th – 6 avg Senior High – up to 10
- Started ReCharge to reach out to Santiago High kids (thanks, Loni)
- Award winning Scouting programs & leaders
 - Mason Park, 1st Eagle Scout for Troop 34
 - Ryan Park working on Eagle Scout project
 - Scouting Sunday is diverse, with scouts from other troops

Community Involvement

- Sisters Together Envisioning Peace (STEP) - interfaith
- Open Hearts Community Festival led by Jerry Eagans
- Car Shows & Flag Retirement, 4th of July parades
- Turkey Dinners & UMW Bazaar + Trustee Auction

Missions

- Missionary Mozart Adevu and his son visited December, 2017
- Church members pack lunches for the homeless at Settlement House plus other support.

United Methodist Women – see *handout*

- Faith in Motion – generosity & volunteer hours, Raney Intermediate School classes, those who are in need in community
- Seams of Faith – countless volunteer hours to craft goods for new mothers at Corona Life, ill/bereaved, veterans
- Book Club – 12 women, 10 books on spiritual or personal growth, great time!
- Bad Girls of the Bible – 20 women, including 5 non-members
- Faith Journey – 12-14 women, including non-members
- STEP – 35 women from different faiths (15 from CUMC)

United Methodist Men

- 20 men gather regularly at Faxon’s home
- Scout leaders participate
- Lead church clean up in collaboration with Trustees
- UMM Dinner and support for other ministries

Campus

- New security system installed with new TVs in classrooms
- Improving grounds, parking lot coat, community garden going well
- Regular clean up days (thanks, UMM)

Gifts & Offerings

- Mortgage was refinanced!
- UMW contributed \$3,280 to UM missions for women, children and youth
- Alternative Christmas raised money for UMC missions
2016- \$6,865 2017 - \$5,600 2018 - \$3,299
- Special gifts ~\$80,000
- Major gift of \$717,000 for use to improve church facilities
- 65% of church participated in January 2019 stewardship campaign

New Ministries

- Family Ministry created led by Susan Park
- Member Care ministry created led by Sharon Brandenberger
- Merged Administrative Board & Council of Ministries into Church Council, streamlined other structures
- Sierra Service Project (youth missions) renewed, Allison liaison
- Midweek service/group – 2+ years (80% have joined church)

- Saturday night group led by Janet Puzon
- Family Game Nights led by Children & Youth Ministries
- Parents’ & Couples’ groups
- Leadership Team spent 2 years in intentional discipleship process
- Valencia Terrace – monthly Bible study
- Members have served on District Committees
 - Linda Faxon – District Committee on Ordained Ministry
 - Richard Carlson – District Union
 - Rufus Rosser – District Union

Training & Classes

- Readiness 360 Plus
- District “How To” workshops
- District Lay leader workshops
- Mission U – UMW, Family Camp and others ...

The bottom line: God is doing a great work in the Corona-Norco-Riverside area! Together, we have heard God’s call and responded with love, compassion and generosity. We have given our time, money and sweat to care for others in our community, neighborhoods and family. When we empty our lives into the lives of others, God will refresh, renew and refill our lives. That’s what it means to receive and to pass on God’s blessing, just as Abram and Sarah did. There’s more to do. We’re at the beginning of our spiritual journey.

There’s a second aspect to keep in mind. The good that God does with us is done even when we carry burdens. Paul teaches us to “*carry one another’s burdens*” for we “*harvest what we plant*” (Galatians 6:2,7a). Paul tells us, “*Let’s not get tired of doing good, because in time we’ll have a harvest if we don’t give up*” (v9). That’s what it means to love and follow Jesus. When we let the Holy Spirit do the work, we find that our burdens become lighter. We bear spiritual fruit when we let God do the work.

That’s important, as we all carry burdens. We don’t often share them. That’s sad, because this is a place where we can be ourselves. God’s house is a safe place. It’s a place filled with God’s grace and mercy that pardons and heals. We know that God loves us, even in our brokenness. We’re valued and appreciated. God loves you!

Some burdens that we carry are personal. Hurts come from our family. Hurts come from work. Hurts come by the choices and actions of others. Self-harm we do through our own choices and actions. We may hurt another person and not realize it. But there are also times when we hurt someone intentionally.

The burdens we carry include compassion for those who are suffering around the world. We, as humans, often do unjust things. We oppress some, marginalize others and alienate more.

The burdens we carry can be very heavy. Divorce, addiction, illness, disease, disability and death are difficult burdens. Please don't carry them alone! Call someone or call me. We care and will pray for you.

Today, I lift up those who are on our hearts:

- Kenny Maxell, Don Zimprich, LaVonne Real, Ed Luekekeyer, Gabriel Escamilla, Sr., Dianna Duncan, Charles Wert, Jerry Eagans and Larry McGee.
- There are those who have lost family and friends over the past few years. I invite you to speak their name out loud or in your heart....

I'll ask one more question: what burden are you carrying?

I invite you to go to another person and share it. If you aren't ready or able to speak about it, I invite you to sit with one another in a moment of silent prayer.

God's blessings aren't limited or bound by the burdens we carry.

In fact, the burdens we carry help us to care for others who are suffering with similar burdens. That's one way we can pass on the peace, grace and blessings of God to one another. Let God in and you'll be amazed at what God will do.

There's good news: God isn't done with us! We have more good work to do. In faith, let's continue to listen and respond to God's call. In love, let's step out on the narrow path, going to places we would rather not go as we follow Jesus. In hope, let's be open to the Spirit of boldness as we offer hospitality, live generously and embrace the diversity of our world.

Let's give honor and thanks to God for blessing us. Pass it on!

Let us pray ...

Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn't be there, and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Help me to follow you and be transformed by your love so I may bless others with that same love. Bless us when we live generously, sharing your love with others. We commit ourselves to you in faith and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Genesis 12:1-5a (CEB)

The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of the earth will be blessed because of you.”

Abram left just as the LORD told him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all of their possessions, and those who became members of their household in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan.

Galatians 6:1-10 (CEB)

Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won't be tempted too. Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are important when they aren't, they're fooling themselves. Each person should test their own work and be happy with doing a good job and not compare themselves with others. Each person will have to carry their own load.

Those who are taught the word should share all good things with their teacher. Make no mistake, God is not mocked. A person will harvest what they plant. Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness, but those who plant for the benefit of the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit. Let's not get tired of doing good, because in time we'll have a harvest if we don't give up. So then, let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith.