

Blessed? Really? Of all the words in the English language, Jesus, you went with Blessed?

Yes, blessed are the poor in spirit....the mourning, the meek, mild and persecuted. Blessed are those who might not be looking forward to Christmas morning, or who have no family with whom to share a holiday meal.

Blessed are those whose Christmas cookies have gone stale or whose milk has soured—and blessed be Jolly old St. Nicolas who will be

coming down a dirty old chimney near you to consume them.

Turn on the news at any point this holiday season and you might wonder about the blessed state of our broken world. A warring world of gun violence, religious intolerance, homelessness, climate change, political bigotry and drug overdoses.

So again, in lieu of our shaky sociological situation, I ask, of all the words in the English language, Jesus, you're really going with Blessed?

Well, yeah, because no one listening to Jesus's prestigious Sermon on the Mount that fateful afternoon on the shores of Lake Galilee spoke the English language! Instead, the word was Greek. Macaros, from the root word, Charos, or time. But we aren't talking about the tics or toks of your wrist watch here...that would be chronos or worldly time—think chronology

Instead, Charos, is better translated as an instant of significance that transcends common measurement during

which we are 100% present in the moment...However good, bad, happy or sad that moment may be.

Because, for as cliché as it may be, it really is true that presence is the greatest present of all. And, we all know that presents are of utmost focus during this holiday season. Right?

Thus, blessed are we, the bruised and broken, who have this time together amidst the hustle and bustle of the holidays to sit with our emotions and be present with the feelings that arise. Not to

**drown them in spiked eggnog
or disguise them with
glittering tinsel and lights.**

**Now, as far as our presence is
concerned this evening,
though we are one day early
this year, this service
traditionally marks the winter
solstice or the longest night,
and it is a little less festive
than the other carol-filled
advent gatherings of the
month—and there is both
spiritual and scientific
reasoning for that.**

**Spiritually this service
recounts the hardships of**

Mary and Joseph who fled their home, only to stumble upon a cold and meager manger where they birthed a son into homelessness. It reflects upon the tragic death of all first-born male children, the result of a moratorium put in place by King Herod upon learning about the Messiah's birth.

It alludes to the difficult life that our savior lived and the death he endured in order that we might celebrate things like the holidays. Yeah...lets just say its a little on the heavy side!

And if the spiritual implications aren't enough to crush your candy cane, the biological may be... From a scientific standpoint this service deals with the lack of serotonin we produce when our circadian rhythms are shortened by the early setting sun. A literal change in our bodily biome that makes us more susceptible to anxiety and depression.

Either way you lean, the reality is true. This might not be the best evening, nor the favorite service of your life.

However, regardless of the blues you may or may not feel, blessed are we who approach these troubling times in community, and with an open heart and mind, so that we might feel what we are feeling in a supportive setting.

Speaking of blues...lets pause ever so briefly to look at the alternative name for this longest night solstice service...

In the words of Elvis, though notably not his voice:

**When those blue snowflakes
start falling
That's when those blue
memories start calling
You'll be doing all right
With your Christmas of white
But I'll have a blue, blue, blue,
blue Christmas**

**However, as I came to find
out while studying up for this
evening's reflection and
exegeting Christmas carols
(yes I am that much of a
nerd), that popular tune, 'Blue
Christmas,' was actually not
Elvis' at all. It was originally
written and performed by Billy
Hayes.**

And, what's more, it wasn't recounting a long-lost-love, at least not of the living variety...it was actually a response to the prohibition laws, or "blue laws" that had dried up the singer's holiday parties.

But, hey, Blessed are the sober of spirit and spirits—for they have the ability to feel their feelings without inhibition or inebriation. Not to mask, but bask in the emotions of the holiday season.

So again, whether you lean more on the scientific reasoning behind seasonal affective disorder, the spiritual struggles that go along with the advent season, or the literal and metaphorical sobriety of the season one thing is true...this isn't everyone's favorite service—but it is an important one for healing our brokenness!

In Japan they have a word that I feel is particularly relevant this season and for this service. Kintsugi. Say that with me...Kintsugi. I want you each to remember that

word this evening. Kintsugi, for the curious, is the Japanese practice of repairing pottery using gold, silver, or platinum to fill in the cracks.

This is a revelatory concept that doesn't seek to hide our brokenness, but instead brings the brokenness into focus by making the cracks and crevasses the most beautiful and valuable parts of the vessel. Its often been said and/or sung in the case of Leonard Cohen, whose Hallelujah we will be singing shortly, that "there is a crack

in everything. That's where the light goes in." And, its true, no one makes it out of this world unscathed. The question lies in how you view life's perceived imperfections.

With that in mind, what if we took a brief minute to rewrite today's gospel passage—Jesus' quintessential Sermon on the Mount—with a focus on presence rather than blessedness in recognition of the cracked nature of our being and our ability to fill the gaps with gold and light?

Present are those who mourn, present are those who are persecuted, present are those who hunger and thirst because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Present are we with our feelings of both brokenness and blessedness.

I want you each to notice that in each of those beatitudes, or “blessed” statements, the blessing is in the now, the present tense. Jesus doesn’t say blessed will be the mourning, weeping or broken-hearted, he says “blessed are.”

Its as Ludwig Wittgenstein once stated, "eternal life is given to those who live in the present." Consider it Heaven on earth if you may.

_____ This is the reason that mindfulness is such a key facet of so many eastern and western religious traditions—because being mindful of your emotions, though they may not always be pleasant, is the only way to transcend the weariness of the worrisome world.

Emotions are a wonderful thing—when we allow ourselves to feel them that is.

In allusion to this evening's reading, they are the salt of our teardrops...tears of both sorrow and laughter. And, as we have already learned, blessed are those who weep.

But what do we do when our tears lose their saltiness? What do we do when we forget how to feel or when our emotions burn us out? What do we do when the pain of the world becomes too much to bear? How do we return to the moment in times when we lose our sense of presence and become numb to newness?

One way is by leaning into community, such as the small but mighty one that surrounds you this evening. To not try to face your emotions all on your own, but to share the struggle—whether in smile or sadness—with those who love you. This is why we will be sharing in the Common-Unifying sacrament of Communion this evening—and know that all are welcome, but none required at this table.

Oh...And if you only remember one phrase from this service, get your pencils and pens

ready because here it is...YOU ARE LOVED. Yes, you are loved by everyone in this room, a plethora of people outside of it, and your divine parent who made you so beautifully in her image. The question is, are you loving on yourself?

I repeat, when you feel beaten down, shameful, depressed, dismal or dumfounded know that You are Loved!

You are loved when you feel unlovable, divinely hugged when you feel untouchable, and holy recognized when you feel broken and forgotten. You

are a gift to this world, lined with gold, silver and platinum, and you are loved. Valued and valuable.

“Well that sounds great Rev. Ryan, but I don’t feel very loved this evening, you may say. No worries, we’ve all been there. Thus I share a second way to spice up your salty spirit: fall victim to awe this advent. To look around and know that everything you see is a miracle, a sign that something greater is in control and that better days are on the horizon.

We all know the spice of awe...we simply just forget to add it to our recipes on occasion.

Awe is the simple magic that transforms a raindrop into the prism that divides plain white light into a rainbow. And note, you can't have rainbow without rain.

Awe is the amazement and love that turns the sound of a crying baby into a spirited symphony. Awe is awesome and inspiring, a mountain peak or ocean sunset.

Awe is excitement...Its blessedness, but not necessarily happiness.

After all, no one likes to hear the words, “Don’t worry be happy” when they are feeling down in the dumps. Instead, awe is about invigoration.

Awe is the gold and silver that the Japanese use to fill in the cracks of their pottery to make the broken more beautiful than when it first took shape. Beautiful, and notably stronger than it was to begin with.

Awe is what those crowds felt as they listened to the living Christ speak from a mountainside on the shores of Galilee that fateful afternoon. Awe is what the Psalmist of this evening's Old Testament reading alluded to when assuring us that The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Yet, though we try to focus on the beautiful, its true that Awe ain't always easy—however, it is always available, because when we step out of ourselves and our

anxieties we are able to realize that everything in life is a miracle and a blessing.

And we like miracles! We prove that via the popularity of the plump, present-giving, sleigh-riding red-robed Santa Clause who will be visiting you in several days under the guidance of a bright-nosed flying reindeer.

So I close this evening with a call. A call to reimagine the cracks in your life, not to hide them or hide from them, but to fill them with the purest of gold. A call to be sober and

somber with both the joy and hurt of the season. A call to lose yourself to the moment's emotions and feel whatever it is that your feelings may be. A call to season this season with the salt of the earth and with the spirit of God's awesome newly born son whose essence overflows from the heavens above, around and within each of us—because eternity resides in you.

Finally, a call to community, because within this room you have friends, new and old, and it is no fun to face this world in isolation.

**And with that I bid thee,
Hallelujah, shalom and merry
Christmas, for the kingdom of
Heaven is not near, but here,
and its time that we embrace
eternity.**

**A Blessing for the
Brokenhearted
by Jan Richardson**

**Let us agree
for now
that we will not say
the breaking**

**makes us stronger
or that it is better
to have this pain
than to have done
without this love.**

**Let us promise
we will not
tell ourselves
time will heal
the wound
when every day
our waking
opens it anew.**

**Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery**

**of how a heart
so broken
can go on beating,
as if it were made
for precisely this—
as if it knows
the only cure for love
is more of it
as if it sees
the heart's sole remedy
for breaking
is to love still**

**as if it trusts
that its own stubborn
and persistent pulse
is the rhythm
of a blessing**

**we cannot
begin to fathom
but will save us
nonetheless.**