

Being blessed is to be a position of favour. So think back for a moment to the history of blessing. When Jacob steals Esau's birthright to get the sought after blessing from their father, Isaac, Jacob becomes the favoured one - the one who is blessed.

When the angel greets Mary in Nazareth with the words, "Greetings favoured one, you have found favour," and Mary wonders what kind of greeting this might be, she knows full well that this an unexpected greeting of blessing. "How can this be," she asks? Because she knows that a young girl would typically not be the recipient of such divine favour.



In the gospel parables, when the father divides his estate between his two sons, both of them are *equally* favoured or blessed. But it appears almost unjust that when the younger son comes back to plead with the father to say "I am *no longer* worthy to be called your son, make me like one of your hired hands," he

recognizes that through the squandering of his father's estate he has, no doubt, lost favour in his father's eyes and is no longer blessed.

Astonishingly, what happens is that he discovers he is *still* blessed, and his status of being a son has not changed.

"Put sandals on his feet, rings on his fingers, bring the best robe and kill the fatted calf. Let us celebrate because this son of mine was lost and is found, was dead and is alive." And so they began to celebrate. And when the older brother refuses to attend the celebration, the father pleads with him and says, "You are always with me. All that I have is yours." In other words you are always in my favour no matter what.

Similarly for the parable of the workers in the marketplace who worked only one hour and were given the same wage as those who had worked all day and born the heat of the day. When the workers who had worked all day complained, the manager said, "Are you jealous because I am generous?"

The bringing in the lost and forsaken, the restoring of the condemned and the exiled, the bringing new life to the desert, and the act of

resurrection for the dead are the consistent acts in the biblical narrative that demonstrate all these people have found favour and are blessed.

So when Jesus announces this litany of blessing to the meek, the lowly, the poor, peacemakers, the persecuted, and the mourners he is announcing something completely new. Previously it would be understood, and still is, that those people, whose lives and conditions are so appalling that it was clearly understood that they had *lost* favour with God, they had done something wrong, they were condemned, and clearly they were no longer blessed, are now the primary recipients of blessing.

This is good news!

Announce it from the housetops and from the hills, because all the trees and rivers rejoice that the desert shall come out in bloom, the valleys shall be raised, and the hills brought low. There shall be in this kingdom of God, a new way of being, a new order, a new creation, and it is one of blessing - for all. That now is our task, our job, our work, to announce this blessing to the world, because it is theirs to claim.

How many times do I encounter someone who thinks they are not good enough; that they are unworthy; that they are unclean; and therefore have disqualified themselves from church. When meanwhile, the whole thrust of the gospel is directed *to and for* them.

You are blessed. You are beloved. You have found favour. And there is nothing you can do to sever that, or change it, or eliminate it.

Communion is the ultimate act of acceptance for this new status. It is the acknowledgment that we have received this gift of favour and blessing, not because we have been particularly bright, or good, or faithful. But only because this is the nature of God to reach out and bring in the lost and forsaken.

The story of Jacob and Esau, and the story of Mary of Nazareth, and the story of the two sons; the story of the disciples, the apostle Paul, and the criminal on the cross: all of these stories, and more, clearly illustrate that it's not about earning this favour - it is about receiving and accepting it; because God's blessing is given.