“The more we recognize our found blessings, the more they increase around us.”
— John O'Donohue

Last year, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, I began to notice an interesting trend. Although everyone was going through a difficult time, some more intensely than others, more people than usual seemed to be counting their blessings--whatever they happened to be.

Some expressed gratitude for the blessings of companionship, while others appreciated times of solitude. Some appreciated the blessings of technology, despite also cursing it at times. For others, blessings appeared in the beauty of nature or the warmth of a loving pet. Even in times of unexpected illness or intense grief, I noticed that people were highlighting the blessings in their lives with surprising frequency. In doing so, they helped me do the same.

The late Irish poet and former priest John O'Donohue wrote often about the power of blessing. He recommended not only counting our blessings by affirming the things for which we're grateful, but also undertaking the act of blessing. He taught that every person (not just ministers or priests) is able to bless others, saying that “A blessing is a circle of light drawn around a person to protect, heal and strengthen.”

Throughout the pandemic, I've seen so many people doing just that: extending love and kindness to people around them, with the hope that all may be blessed with well being. At the same time, people have sought to bless so many experiences in their lives--and not just the obviously pleasant ones--with appreciation and gratitude. It was as if the many "blessings in disguise" in our lives suddenly un-cloaked themselves, allowing us to see them in the light of love and meaning.

As we move into the December holiday season, blessed with the renewed opportunity to gather both in person and online for special services, I wish us all the ability to appreciate the many gifts that are continually revealing themselves in our lives. May we continue to bless each other with our care and presence, during these transformative times.

With love,

Lynn
Questions to Live With

1. When has "counting your blessings" been a helpful practice for you? Have you ever found it difficult, or impossible, to do?

2. What have been the "blessings in disguise" in your life? What changed your outlook on them?

3. Is there anything in your life today that might be a blessing in disguise?

4. Have you ever offered a blessing to another person, or received a blessing from someone else? What was that experience like for you?

5. What person, place or thing would you like to "draw a circle of light around" to protect, heal or strengthen?

6. If not one of these questions, what is your question about blessing this month?

For Inspiration

“The Art of Blessing the Day”

... the discipline of blessings is to taste each moment: the bitter, the sour, the sweet and the salty, and be glad for what does not hurt. The art is in compressing attention to each little and big blossom of the tree of life, to let the tongue sing each fruit, its savour, its aroma and its use.

- Marge Piercy

A drenching, nourishing rain in the mountains. The beat of it on the roof. Its glimmer as it courses off the eaves. The tears of Mother Earth, blessing everything and empowering life. Lift your face to it and feel her energy. She’s in you - she’s in me. We are kin.

- Richard Wagamese, Embers

In the light and reverence of blessing, a person or situation becomes illuminated in a completely new way. In a dead wall a new window opens, in dense darkness a path starts to glimmer, and into a broken heart healing falls like morning dew.

- John O'Donohue

The thing to do, it seems to me, is to prepare yourself so you can be a rainbow in somebody else’s cloud. Somebody who may not look like you. May not call God the same name you call God - if they call God at all. I may not dance your dances or speak your language. But be a blessing to somebody.

- Maya Angelou

Within ourselves we all have the gifts and talents we need to fulfill the purpose we’ve been blessed with.

- Steve Maraboli, Life, the Truth and Being Free
Some people come into our life as a blessing, while others come into our life as a lesson, so love them for who they are instead of judging them for who they are not.
- Yolanda Hadid

I was pirouette and flourish, I was filigree and flame. How could I count my blessings when I didn't know their names?
- Rita Dove, *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*

In the middle of my morning’s work, I break for blessings: a deep breath, a glance out the window, a graceful stretch, a remembrance of God, a brief reflection on the nobility of work, an encouraging word, a grateful thought, a smile, a short prayer, a remembrance of who I am, a sip of freshly brewed coffee. I honor the wisdom of pausing. This is the Spirit’s hour. I sense the overshadowing presence of all that is holy, and I remember that I am God’s temple on earth, a channel for loving service.
- Macrina Wiederkehr, *Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day*

My body is just built different. Some people try to look at it as a weakness, but I look at it as a blessing.
- Zion Williamson

You are more than you know, and more beloved than you know. Take up what power is yours to create safe haven, to make of earth a heaven. Give hope to those you encounter, that they may know safety from inner and outer harm, be happy and at peace, healthy and strong, caring and joyful. Be the blessing you already are. That is enough. Blessed Be.
- Adapted by John and Sarah Gibb Millspaugh from the Karaniya Metta Sutta (Sunna Nipata 1.8) of the Pali Canon

May the blessing of the light be always with you
May the sun shine upon you and warm your heart
Until it glows so that others around you will feel your warmth.
May the light of your love shine
Like glowing candles in a window at night
May the light of your love be as a star,
Pointing the way.
May the blessing of the sweet rain be upon you.
May it fall upon your spirit as flowers in spring
Bursting into life and fragrance filling the air.
May the blessing of rain renew you,
Making you fresh and innocent.
And may your light, like a star, guide us all.

We all are so deeply interconnected; we have no option but to love all. Be kind and do good for any one and that will be reflected. The ripples of the kind heart are the highest blessings of the Universe.
- Amit Ray
Into this home we bring our hunger for awakening.
We bring compassionate hearts, and a will toward justice.
Into this home we bring the courage to walk on after hard losses.
Into this home we bring our joy, and gratitude for ordinary blessings.
By our gathering we bless this place.
In its shelter we know ourselves blessed.

- Kathleen McTigue

I recognize and honour our ‘tangled blessing’, that is, the way that life tends to arrive not distinctly as joy, or grief, but rather all mixed up...Sometimes our task is simply to be awake and with a grateful heart to see the also-true story of the good in the midst of this grief—the blessing in the midst of suffering.

- Rev. Gretchen Haley

**Optional Spiritual Exercise**

Revisit and meditate this month on your own tangled blessing and then find a way to represent what it gave or taught you through some form of artistic expression, e.g., journal, write a poem, paint, take or compile photos.

"Blessings", Soul Matters
Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with a small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website https://firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/, or look for the link in First Light.

Upcoming Themes

January– Intention | February – Contentment | March– Money | April– Awakening | May– Beauty

Upcoming Services

Sundays at 10:30


New Horizons Editing Team: Wendy Peebles, Jeanne Van Bronkhorst, Margaret Kohr, Josée Thibault, Rev. Shawn Newton, Rev. Lynn Harrison