

“Fulfilled”

Luke 1:1-4, 3:21-22 & 4:14-21

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January 23, 2022

Prayer for Understanding Loving God fill us with your Spirit, your breath, your abundant life. Open our eyes to beauty, our ears to harmony, our hearts to love our minds to wisdom and our souls to joy. Speak to us through your love letter to us the Bible and through one another. Amen

Two ways to be blessed are to be grateful for the joy, love, and goodness in your life and to imagine how your life is expanding joy, love, and goodness.

Luke begins his gospel: **Luke 1:1-4 “Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.”** For Luke, the right meaning of the life and resurrection of Jesus is found in the idea of “fulfilling events”. God’s promises are fulfilled in Jesus. God’s promise to bless all people is being fulfilled. In each account in the gospel of Luke, one finds snippets of fulfilled blessings. Putting all of these fulfillments together gives one a sense of the coming glory all will enjoy.

Luke hopes these fulfillment accounts will invigorate our hope making us certain of the truth; God’s steadfast love endures forever and all will be washed clean, purified, glorified, and enjoy abundant, eternal life. We are being set free to savor every blessing and share blessings.

Luke is inviting us to perceive deeper than the surface of these accounts, to imagine how every goodness will be fulfilled and to dream of our coming abundant life fulfilled. The invitation is to rejoice, for every love, joy, and peace will expand and every aspect of life will be enhanced. The invitation is to put yourself in these fulfilling accounts. Each account has similarities, connections, invitations, fulfillments in you. The invitation is to be grateful for blessings received and to celebrate your sharing of blessings.

Luke 3:21-22 NLT “One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As Jesus was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Child, and you bring me great joy.” One of the invitations here is for you to perceive God saying to you: **“You are my dearly loved Child, and you bring me great joy.”** Another invitation is to imagine the Holy Spirit opening the glory of heaven to you.

Two- and one-half years ago I was on a spectacular trip with Leslie, Spencer, and Abigail. God says “I love you” through the majesty of creation. I saw spectacular sights, lush rainforests, rugged mountains, black lava, sea cliffs, vibrant coral, thundering waterfalls, red rock canyons, white, black, green, red, yellow sand beaches and much more. I delighted in swimming with sea turtles. I was filled with wonder by grand trees in a myriad of sizes, shapes, and colors, bamboo, banyan, and rainbow. We enjoyed a variety of tasty food and fruits that we never tasted before, such as ice cream bananas. God says “I love you” through family and friends. We laughed and played together. We celebrated and dreamed together. How do you perceive God saying to you **“You are my dearly loved Child, and you bring me great joy.”**

After the baptism Jesus went through a season of wilderness, struggle, grief, and pain. At the end of that spectacular trip, sitting on the plane, my mind perceived a voice, a different voice than my normal inner voice. The voice communicated more than words. In summary, the message was “be grateful for this trip, remember this trip, remember the love you experienced, remember the love you shared with Leslie, Spencer, and Abigail, for those memories will sustain you through an arduous season.” A wave of foreboding and dread seized me. Then, the voice instructed me to remember a moment of joy and the foreboding and dread left me. The flight back home was long as I wrestled with the meaning and guidance of that experience.

I had been experiencing hip pain before this trip; however, Advil and P.T made it tolerable. The joy of the trip enabled me to divert my attention away from the pain. When we landed, I could barely walk, the pain was sharp and intense. And so began a season strewn with death, surgeries, health issues, accidents, injuries, loss, grief, pain, uncertainty, unexpected change, and Covid. Throughout this season, I sensed the voice communicating, remember

goodness, be grateful. My spiritual director helped me understand and reminded me also to remember goodness and be grateful.

John Shea writes: “This is a classic pattern of how religious experiences unfold. They begin with a consciousness of our eternal grounding in God. Aware that this grounding is unconditional, we quickly interpret it as love. But when consciousness returns to the rough-and-tumble of time, we do not know how to translate what we experienced into our conflicted minds and our concrete decision-making processes. In this context deepening spiritual knowledge entails discovering the path from transcendent identity to historical mission.”

Hopefully, you can recall moments when you felt loved, these are sacred moments, heaven ripping, Holy Spirit embracing, God saying “I love you” moments. Often these moments are fleeting. The chaos of life pulls our attention in a myriad of directions. Remembering our loving moments reorients us, sustains us, and can create space for more loving moments.

The heavens split, the Holy Spirit embraced Jesus, a voice said: **“You are my dearly loved Child, and you bring me great joy.”** And yet this experience did not come with a set of detailed instructions. The Holy Spirit remained with Jesus and guided Jesus through the wilderness, filled his memory with goodness, and revealed ways for Jesus to fulfill God’s promises, blessing all people. Living life gives us opportunities to love, to rejoice, to be at peace. Living life gives us opportunities to receive blessings, savor blessings, and share blessings.

On December 19, the Sunday of the Christmas drama, *Angels Among Us*, I put on a purple shirt and grey pants that I had not worn for two- and one-half years because I gained 40 pounds and they did not fit. On that Sunday, I had lost 36 pounds and they once again fit. When I buttoned the last button a sense of peace overwhelmed me. Suddenly, images from the last two- and one-half years rapidly flashed through my mind. I was back on the plane. The voice communicated that the wilderness season is over for me. I felt light and peace permeated me.

Now in addition to being grateful for the abundance of good memories I have lived; I am also grateful that those memories sustained me through one of my wilderness seasons. I pray that your good memories will sustain you through your wilderness experiences. Our wilderness experiences may make us miserable, however they never define us or diminish us. Each of us is God’s masterpiece, created unique, permeated with goodness, designed for eternity, constructed with capacity to grow in love and joy forever.

A way that our blessings are fulfilled is to recall, good, sacred, holy, and God sighting moments, to perceive God saying to you, **“You are my dearly loved Child, and you bring me great joy.”** Our blessings are also fulfilled in the other direction from the secular to the sacred. In the ways you create goodness, love, and joy by you being yourself, and in the ways you serve. Two ways to be blessed are to be grateful for the joy, love, and goodness in your life and to imagine how your life is expanding joy, love, and goodness.

Luke 4:14-21 NLT “Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit’s power. Reports about Jesus spread quickly through the whole region. Jesus taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When Jesus came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for God has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.” Jesus rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at Jesus intently. Then Jesus began to speak to them. “The Scripture you have just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

John Shea wrote, “Jesus is not doing an assigned reading. Jesus searches to find the words that will spell out the meaning of “Child of God.” Jesus finds the Spirit-driven mission language of Isaiah. To be the Child of God is to be on a mission of liberation. Wherever human life is impoverished, imprisoned, impaired, it will become enriched, free, and enabled. All this will be done by the power of divine favor. Child of God is not a title of privilege. It is a call to transformative action. It is a word of hope to a hopeless situation. Jesus tells them the promise has been fulfilled. When Jesus spoke the words and they heard them, they were no longer words of prediction. They were words of inauguration.”

As a beloved child of God put yourself into this scripture. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon you, for God has anointed you to bring Good News to the poor. God is sending you to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.” How are you fulfilling your anointing, sharing blessings?

Sometimes it helps to reflect on the ways you have blessed people in the past, the ways you set people free, the ways you share love, joy, and peace with others. My spiritual director often helps me examine my life, to identify

ways that I am serving God and others, ways that I am enhancing life. I keep seeking to answer. What is God doing in my life? What is God doing in this church? What is God doing in the world? How can I partner with God in that?

Frederick Buechner said, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

Another way is to forget all of this, for the secular leads to the sacred. When you do something pure that brings you joy, you are journeying from the secular to the sacred. When you perform some task that adds to the common good, you are journeying from the secular to the sacred. When you rest, are at peace, created, serve, love, you are journeying from the secular to the sacred. Journeying in this direction gradually reveals that we are responding to God, setting ourselves free, setting others free, that we are fulfilling God’s promise to bless all people. When you discover something that is fulfilling it is a blessing of God. The blessing usually also has an invitation to share, to provide fulfillment for others.

When we are true to ourselves, true to our personality, talents, longings, we are fulfilling the goodness that is ourselves, fulfilling the cosmos with another child of God flourishing with the abundant life God placed within us. Being our good self, sharing love, being joyful is our purpose, our destiny, which fulfills God’s promises.

Luke began his gospel stating his intent, to invite us all into the accounts, to find ourselves in them, to be fulfilled, to discover how the cosmos is being fulfilled, to dream of all of God’s promises being fulfilled so we can be certain of the truth. All will be fulfilled. Amen