

The blessings continue

Editor's Note: In January, I sent out a call for help. After having cataract surgery and facing a second one, my ability to chase down stories was temporarily limited, so I enlisted readers' help to fill the March and April papers.

I used my email contact list to send a mass message: could you write a short article about a memorable time in your life when you were blessed?

Readers did not disappoint! Here are some of the many responses I received. There may even be enough to publish more of them in the May paper.

Thank you to all who responded. You have saved the day, and I trust, blessed others with your wonderful stories! I know they certainly blessed me!

And for those asking, the two surgeries were a success and I am healing well.

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Joy in second chances

Our home is blessed as a place of second chances. About 12 years ago, our lives changed forever.

Scott and I both had lost our spouses way too soon and through great suffering and pain.

God (and some behind the scenes matchmakers) brought us together. Our lives were being re-worked.

On June 9, 2019 our families, friends and Richmond Parish family gathered as we were joined in marriage. It was a truly blessed, joy-filled day! We became a family formed through second chances.

On Nov. 8, 2020, we adopted our precious rescue dog, Callie. She, too, has a home for her second chance.

She has changed from a "throw away" dog to one who is filled with "dog" joy. She has claimed her home and her people as her own, and the last taste of any snack going.

Even our property is having its second chance. It was once the centre of a family farm but abandoned.

Scott has built flower beds, garden boxes, seating areas, and his statement of faith, a white rock cross.

Peonies, poppies and sunflowers bring joy to us and those passing by.

Hopefully, one day, we will be able to share the bounty from the vegetable garden boxes with those struggling.

There is joy from working the soil and being amid flowers, trees, and God's little creatures including a feisty hummingbird and a squirrel or two to entertain Callie.

We are so blessed to be in this place. Being thankful opens our hearts to be filled with joy.

Most of our days, it is just the three of us enjoying our second chances.

Life is simple but filled with joy. It isn't always laughter, but for us there is that deep feeling of belonging, of being loved, valued, accepted and safe. We are at peace and our joy is fed.

Christ dwells within us and these walls. "As for me and my household we will serve the Lord."

Our most cherished blessings are the four gorgeous grandbabies that Scott's children have given us. The giggles that seem to come up from their tiny toes, the squeals of "It's Nana B and Grandpa" are pure joy.

When you step onto our front deck, a red sign with white letters greets you: "JOY." We are blessed with joy and wish all who come and go from our home of second chances "joy."

Whatever your lot seems to be now, in Christ, there is hope of second chances and yes, joy beyond measure. Blessings, and joy!

Bonnie Sparks, Scott Goodine and Callie, Belleville, N.B.

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Small groups are not for me

I heard many times people talking about joining small groups in private homes and that was not for me. The church I grew up in, St. Luke's, in Saint John, didn't really do that kind of thing.

So when my husband, Rob, was approached about us joining a small group through Grand Bay Baptist Church, I was very hesitant. I was told I would know a couple of participants as I have always had a connection with the Baptist church.

As COVID was at its worst we were holding our meetings on Zoom. The team leaders delivered a tea bag and muffin to each person that would be joining the meeting.

The first meeting was a more of a get-to-know-you evening with one participant, their new associate pastor, joining us from Egypt because he did not have a work visa to come to Canada yet.

They were very welcoming of someone that did not belong to their church.

When we started to meet in person after the COVID restrictions changed, I found I got to know the group much better and felt less hesitant to speak.

This group has changed my life and I don't know what I would do without it. We always have a prayer time at the end of the meeting and we have seen many people blessed through answered prayer.

These individuals are like an extended family. If I miss a week, I feel like I have missed an important event in my life.

We uphold each other and strengthen each other in times of need. We also have a private Facebook group where we can leave prayer requests as needed and share joys and sorrows.

I am so blessed to have this group of people in my life, and I have learned a lesson — that small groups are for me and this group has become truly a blessing in my life.

**Linda Pitman
Parish of Portland**

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On Advent Sunday 2021, in the midst of COVID, and the strong possibility that we would once again face closure due to increased provincial infection rates, I arrived at Trinity church, Kingston, in anticipation of the New Year, but also with great anxiety of the unknown.

As I went to the front of the church and looked around I saw six of my lay readers sporadically gathered. At first I just thought everyone showed up early for some reason, but thought nothing of it.

Then suddenly one announced why we were all gathered, and I was presented with a beautiful banner of the Nativity, in appreciation of all my training and efforts during this difficult time.

I was deeply moved and totally taken unaware. I will never forget that day and the kindness showed. It now is a permanent feature in the rectory, year-round, to remind me that pondering the future and its uncertainty comes with "fear not."

**The Rev. Douglas Painter
Parish of Kingston**

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The strangeness felt when attending a different place of worship can be stimulating.

Some years ago I was at another Anglican church. It was early in the morning, attendance was sparse and I sat at the back.

Quite a ways in front of me was a couple well into their 80s. I knew their

names, but otherwise we were not acquainted.

I was sitting far enough behind

them that I noticed something that might not have been apparent had I sat closer, or which I would probably

have filtered out had I known them better.

What I saw is that whenever they

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Tina Fowler; Scott Goodine & Bonnie Sparks on their wedding day in 2019; The Nativity banner given to the Rev. Douglas Painter by his layreaders during Advent 2022; the Rev. Keith Joyce; Callie the rescued dog; Linda Pitman; David Bell.



stood during the service, they leaned towards each other. They were not touching, as if for physical support, but merely leaning.

What I thought, observing from the back, is that after so many years of loving companionship, they were simply, naturally, unconsciously, instinctively drawn towards one another.

In their feebleness they were enacting a scene of purified love — mature, refined, purged of busy superfluity.

I was so moved by the message they were sending out that I was led to remember, as I do from time to time, that Hebrews chapter 13 tells us that God sometimes communicates via angels in disguise.

**David Bell
Parish of Richmond**

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A blessing undeserved

I stole money from the orphanage's petty cash and had a blast!

For a boy in Grade 3, five Lebanese lira (pounds) in the 1950s was a lot of money.

The next day at school in downtown Beirut, at recess, my friend and I went to a nearby store and absolutely filled our pockets and a few bags with as much candy as we could buy!

When back to school, we thoroughly enjoyed being the envy of our classmates.

Maybe we shared a bit of our candy but potentially not too much. I can't remember.

What a sweet day! In the remaining hours we no doubt sailed along on a stimulating sugar high.

Perhaps that's what drew my teacher's attention to something a little different in her class that particular day. Who knows? She never discussed it with me.

But I do remember quite clearly that she gave me a note to take home to my parents. I never looked at it.

Whether it was written in English or Arabic wouldn't have mattered. I was equally fluent in both languages, since this was an Arabic-speaking school, so I could have read it easily enough.

Regardless, fear began to creep into my thoughts; I didn't dare touch that note! Did this note have anything to do with all the candy and questioning where the money to buy it came from?

It was a very long 45-minute ride by public transit up into the mountains of Lebanon. That's where the orphanage was that my parents were looking after at the time. My parents and I lived on site.

By the time I was let off at the

orphanage driveway, I was shaking in my boots. I could already feel the warmth on my backside which I was sure would be coming upon mother reading that note!

I hit the driveway running straight to Mum, the tears already flowing, confession of my thieving ways more than at the ready!

All I remember next is being taken into my mother's arms and being strongly hugged as I clung to her for all I was worth.

What was said I cannot recall. All I remember is that I was forgiven; I wasn't punished. This was beyond a blessing. It was pure grace! And a huge relief to a young boy!

**The Rev. Keith Joyce
Parish of Lancaster**

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Angels

The lights are low the music soft and calming, and it feels like the most peaceful place on earth.

In fact, it was the best place for me to meet not one but two angels — the one by my side that held my hand as I sought comfort from an old wound on my soul, and the one who was to mend a hurt that I didn't know existed.

I came to this place to ask for help to raise a cloud of pain that I felt had haunted me from childhood.

A gentle voice encourages me to put down all my burdens. As I do, my senses are overcome with the smell of flowers and the warmth of the sun on my face. Here in this beautiful garden, I feel the weight of a hand on my shoulder.

"See this child before you? This is Amy Elizabeth, and she is safe with me."

Strangely I recognize this young girl and the woman with her. As my eyes fill with tears, I realize this is my child lost to a miscarriage eight years before.

Being a nurse, I had easily dismissed that event as nature's way. Our presence in this garden opened my eyes to the fact that my child has a soul and her brief life was precious.

I went from that place mourning what was lost, but ready to encourage others to view a miscarriage as more than a natural end to a flawed pregnancy.

My angels held me up and taught me that every soul is precious.

**Tina Fowler
Parish of Lancaster**

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Paradise, perhaps

In 1983, my first year at university, I took a year-long course in the poetry of John Milton, taught by the inspiring, but stern, professor of English, Dr. Harriet Kirkley.

We spent the fall semester studying the sonnets, lyrics and minor poems. The entire spring semester was dedicated to a close reading of *Paradise Lost*.

One Saturday morning near the end of term, the entire class met at Prof. Kirkley's house so that we might read the great poem from start to finish. At 10,000 lines of blank verse, it was going to take all day.

At 8 a.m. we arranged ourselves on a circle of cushions on her living room floor. We drank coffee and took turns reading aloud, reliving the revolt of the angels in Heaven, their ensuing fall, and Satan's plan to continue his war against God by attacking the creatures of Earth.

At noon, having finished five of the 12 books, we were served small sandwiches, a selection of vegetables, and were told to go outside for a walk. It would be best, Prof. Kirkley said, if we did not talk to each other, but let the great themes of the poem echo in our minds.

Upon returning to our cushions, we read about the beauty of Eden, the fall of Adam and Eve, and the judgment pronounced upon them.

By early afternoon, chilled white wine replaced the coffee. We took one more break about 5 p.m. to dine on take-out pizza, and to take another short walk outside.

We ended the day by reading the last two books of the poem in which the Archangel Michael visits Adam, and speaks of a coming Savior who will win back for humankind their lost paradise.

By this time it was 7 p.m. and sunset. Not counting the two half-hour breaks, we had



been reading for 10 hours, which is a lot of poetry, even for me.

I would not have called myself a Christian at the time. I was interested. I was attracted, yet unconvinced.

But as I walked back to campus that evening, through the Endowment Lands of UBC, the lush rainforest, the smell of cedar and Douglas fir, and the scream of an ambulance passing just beyond the curtain of trees, the reality of Paradise was made clear to me, both in its original creation, and its subsequent loss.

I felt myself a different person walking home than I had been when setting out that morning. I had, as C.S. Lewis puts it, had "my imagination baptized."

**The Rev. Andrew Horne
Parishes of Cambridge and
Waterborough / Gagetown**

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Now that I am several years past my 'three score years and 10,' I find myself looking back on various aspects of my life. As I do, I see very clearly that God has blessed me continuously and in many different ways.

As it was with many post-war baby boomers, my parents took me to services at Christ Church Cathedral almost every Sunday.

At home and through the church, the seeds of my faith were planted in those early years.

By example more than specific teaching, my parents



and a wonderfully supportive extended family showed me how to live a 'love God and love your neighbour' kind of life.

Through my high school and university years, I was blessed to have had special teacher-mentors who, by word and example, prepared me for life and a career.

One man in particular quietly guided me as I dealt with the inevitable ups and downs of life.

In my working career I was blessed as other mentors, interesting jobs and many opportunities came my way. I now believe that each of these influential people was a gift from God to me.

As I began the second half of my life I recall wrestling with life's bigger questions. In my 40s, through a faith experience I was challenged when a priest said, 'We are going to say the Nicene Creed. If you truly believe it, I invite you to say it with us.'

That challenging statement was a turning point in my faith. Since then, bishops, priests and spiritually gifted lay leaders have taught, guided and encouraged me as I went further and deeper on my faith journey.

Sunday sermons, Advent and Lent learning sessions, Cursillo and the opportunity to serve God on the organizational side of our Anglican Church have been a multi-year blessing. God has been in all of these experiences.

As my journey continues, my faith is sure. I know that I have been blessed by God, and

I am thankful.

**Jim Morell
Christ Church Cathedral**

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We are more blessed than we realize, and sometimes it just takes stopping and taking a second look at our lives to realize just how fortunate we truly are.

In my case, I am blessed that I broke my hip in July. I fell at a friend's house, had some time in the hospital, plus some respite care at Windsor Court, and felt pretty sorry for myself much of the time.

I had lost my dear husband of 62 years, Bill, in January, and hadn't really processed the immense change in my life. I had just kept going, doing errands, visiting friends and going out for lunch, and feeling as if I were coping fairly well.

Falling and the attendant pain and stress made me stop and look at my life and realize how much I had lost, not only in the case of Bill, but in my loss of independence and mobility.

I had always been extremely independent, the one picking people up and taking them places, making meals for shut-ins, and so on.

I had to learn to let go of that image of myself, and allow people to help me. I have struggled with that in the past, but am gradually learning to let people in, and to allow them to help.

Many times people don't know what to do for you, but they are anxious to help — and grateful when you reach out and ask them for something specific.

The blessing in that is far-reaching: I am healthier, less stressed, and far more grateful for the smallest thing. I also realize that I can do more than I thought I could. I am giving myself permission to do things differently, and to ask for help with the things I can't quite handle yet.

My life is richer than it was now that I'm not being "Poor Me!" I'm not sure that all clouds have a silver lining, but

my fall became a silver lining for me. Blessings abound if we just look for them.

**Carolyn Turney
Christ Church Cathedral**

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With each day I receive so many blessings. Which one stands out? I have reflected on my blessings for a few days now and have found it very difficult to think of a memorable one.

That was until Ash Wednesday and hearing our associate priest, Dan McMullen, speak on the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6.

My many memorable blessings: family, health, safety, deeds, friends, and so on are my receipt of rewards in full. I have to go deeper!

Spaces for God, acknowledged by Dan as spoken by a fellow clergy, got me thinking of what Dan was preaching. I am paraphrasing here: Lent is making spaces for God to come in and do His thing. I need to get out of his way.

My blessing is recognizing those spaces that God is helping me to create, inviting Him into my heart and following His lead.

I know this, but the sermon resonated with me: give Jesus the space to speak and me the sense to listen — and the blessings will flow.

One time I especially felt a blessing was many years ago on the day of one of my parents' funeral. I felt I had to gain control in order to be a support for the rest of my family. I prayed for strength.

Physically, I felt a gentle but firm tug on my shoulders, standing me taller and straighter and whispering, "you've got this."

My faith that Jesus would walk with me, even carry me when needed, certainly was a blessing that day!

Thank you Jesus for paving the way for my many blessings!

**Georgie Keith
Parish of Sussex**

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