

Two weeks ago, I took a long awaited trip to God's country in Colorado. It had been 5 years since I had been out there which is a long time between visits to see family. Spending time in God's creation revitalized me both mentally and spiritually thanks in part to my aunt and uncle who reminded me that despite all the hardships we are facing, we each have blessings to be thankful for. It was hazy in Colorado because of the fires on the west coast and there was some severe flooding. Yet, it was a blessing to be able to spend time in the grandeur of God's creation. Our reading Psalm 34 today is all about blessings and gratitude. It seemed fitting for me to share some gratitude I had to get you thinking about what you are grateful for. I often get asked by friends, especially at college during busy times of the semester, how I can be so happy or positive. I always tell them that something good happens every day if you know where to look. Now if you have every talked to me at length about anything, you know I do my fair share of complaining about problems and inconveniences, but rarely do I go a day without cracking a smile. When David says, "I will bless the Lord at all times" this is what he means. It is impossible dare I say naive to think that someone can whether anything without negativity or frustration. However, the old adage of "God has a plan" I think can help us further understand what David meant. I love learning, its why I am going to school for another two years, so when I am faced with challenges I tend to try and find a lesson or an example, something I can be grateful to have received. God's plan for my challenges is to teach me a lesson I will need later or build strength and resilience for the future. Taking time to think about what you receive in the midst of your challenges helps you to better understand how to bless the Lord. I find it ironic

that I have the opportunity to preach on the 34th psalm because it was used in communion liturgy for my cousin's wedding I attended about a month ago. This wedding was postponed for a year due to the pandemic. The bride had her dress, everything was ready and then the world stopped. However, at the wedding there was no anger or frustration, there was joy. The months of waiting made the occasion more special than it could have ever been. Not only was it a wedding, but it was the first time in months that families were able to gather, that friends could catch up, that people could be people. My experiences over the last month have shown me it pays dividends to bless the Lord for every small gift. But it is not the easiest thing in the world. At certain times I find it hard to be so conscientious about blessings, especially when the news is so negative and all I see are problems. How do we break our cycle of anger, frustration, and hopelessness? Enter Paul. In Ephesians he lays out almost step for step how to break this cycle, count our blessings, and exalt God. First he says to "put away falsehood, let all of us speak truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another." So many of our problems stem from the fact that we speak and act as if we are divided. We look down on people we disagree with, we compartmentalize and prioritize "our problems" over "their problems" and we are so concerned with what we have and what we don't. These are the falsehoods we tell ourselves and each other every day. Now it may sound idealistic, but the world would be so much better if we helped each other. I'm not talking about the people in this room or even people you know. I'm talking about taking the extra minute to help a stranger carry grocery to their car. To look your cashier in the eye and genuinely say thank you. To see the homeless, ask if they are hungry. To take the extra second to

make a difference in someone's day. Ephesians says, "Thieves must give up stealing," so don't take but give. This is how we bless the Lord; this is how we count our blessings. While we have challenges, we have the blessing of time so use it to make difference. Paul goes on to say, "Let no evil come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need." We have a saying, "actions speak louder than words" and we mistake that for meaning that words are weak, but they are not. Albus Dumbledore summed it up well when he affirmed, "Words are our most inexhaustible source of magic." Excuse my use of fantasy literature, but I think he has a point. While actions can make change, words are what spur people to action or justify inaction. It was not my first time in Colorado, but it was my girlfriend's, and she asked me what I thought about the view from Pikes Peak. Pike Peak is about 14,000 high and I could have said, I've seen it before, but instead I chose to enjoy its splendor not for its novelty, but for its majesty and joined her in ogling over the view. With a few words I blessed God, spoke truth, and built up. At the wedding one of the groomsmen gave a speak that thanked people for coming and named all the places from which guests had traveled. My family was one of the farthest travelers and with a simple gesture we felt both loved and appreciated and the food was served on time. It is not hard if we consciously think about how we speak to and behave toward people. While the Bible is filled with accounts of great actions, I mean there is an entire book called acts, the passages we often return to are words: and the LORD said, and the Prophet said, and Jesus said. My measuring our word and examining our action not only we can live as God intended but we can help make that a reality for others as well. So speak truth, give up theft, build up when

there is need and we may be worthy to be called imitators of God. Amen.