was sitting in a hospital
waiting room some years
ago where someone I loved
was a patient. The only other
person in the waiting room was
a gentleman who was waiting
for a doctor to return with a
prescription. Someone walking
by said “Hello” to this man. He
replied, “Have a blessed day.”
When we were alone, I said to
him, “Now that’s a great word,
‘Have a blessed day,’ because it
suggests that you are trusting
God to do the blessing.” The
man turned to me and said,
“That’s right!” He went on to
say he was a new believer in
the person of Jesus, and he
described the power of his new
faith in Christ. Then he asked
me, “Do you know what
blessed means?” I said, “Well,
yes, but what do you think it
means?” He replied, “Blessed
means ‘He will make you
rise!’”

After the doctor gave him
his prescription, this gracious
man stepped into a nearby
elevator, turned around, looked
me in the eye and said, “Have a
blessed day.” I replied, “He will
make you rise!” and the man
was gone. I thought, Wow,
what a marvelous way to think
about this matter of being
blessed. Suddenly, I was seeing
God at work in my life, remind-
ing me that the Lord intends to
make me rise, would sustain the
life of my friend who was ill.
Ours is the God who loves to
bless.

The concept of blessing and
being blessed is the key con-
cept in the Book of Genesis.
The word blessing is used some
ninety times. We see repeat-
edly that God pronounces
blessing and God provides
blessing. God pronounces
blessing on Abraham and then
provides it. God pronounces
blessing on Isaac and then
provides it. Are you a person
who pronounces and provides
blessings in the people in your
life just as your Lord blesses
you?

Last week, Pete began a new
series, “Life is Messy,” based
on the life of Jacob that we read
about in Genesis. Jacob was the
grandson of Abraham, and his
life was certainly a messy life,
with all of the fears, anxieties
and conflicts that you and I
experience in our own messy
lives. What is fascinating to
observe is how the love of God
blesses Jacob and his family
even when they don’t deserve
it. After the twins, Esau and
Jacob, were born to Isaac and
Rebekah, each parent begins to
favor one of the twins. Isaac
favors the athlete, the hunts-
Life was messy because they made a mess of it.

man, Esau, while Rebekah favors the quiet son, Jacob, and a lot of messed up family relationships come of that favoritism, just as it would today. Both Jacob and Esau are driven with the same motive, however, to please themselves. Esau pleases himself through immediate pleasure. He sells his birthright for a bowl of soup. He marries locally and not from their Hebrew people. Jacob pleases himself with cunning, deceit and patience. They both get what they want initially, and they both reap difficulty later because of their actions. Life was messy because they made a mess of it. It’s easy to see us in their mirror.

Things come to a head when Rebekah overhears her husband, Isaac, telling son Esau to hunt and prepare a savory meal for him so that before he dies, Isaac may bless Esau. So Rebekah, who favors Jacob, works up a scheme in which Jacob puts on Esau’s clothes and lambskin on his neck and arms so he feels hairy like Esau, because his father, Isaac, could no longer see but feels and smells who he thinks is Esau, Jacob gets away with it.

24 He said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He answered, “I am….” 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.” 27 So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. 28 May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. 29 Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!”

Genesis 27:24-29

So, Jacob gets the blessing and blessed he was. Everything that Isaac sought for his son in that blessing came to pass. When Esau came home from hunting and prepared a meal and brought it to Isaac, it was rather a shock to them both as they figured out Jacob had stolen the blessing. Esau cries out; 38 Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. 39 Then his father, Isaac, answered him: “See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. 40 By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck” (Genesis 27:38-40). Well, it was a blessing, but rather less than the one Jacob received.

What I find interesting is that over the years both men actually were blessed by God.
Both had extensive families and extensive flocks. As the Book of Hebrews was to report, “By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau” (Hebrews 11:20). The fact was those people lived really messy lives, lives of favoritism, deceit and anxiety; yet in the midst of their brokenness they also looked to the God of heaven who loved them. In the same way, in the midst of our own messy, broken lives, we may look to the same Lord who loves you and me. And we don’t miss this huge fact. As messed up as Isaac and Rebekah were, as messed up as their sons became, they knew their roles were to bless their children and to entrust their futures to the God who loves them. For those of us who have a role in a child’s life, we have the same opportunity to pronounce a blessing and to provide a blessing in that child’s life. In fact, since our God blesses us, we are invited in turn to bless whomever God puts into our lives.

A word gaining traction in the wider church today is the word, “missional.” Missional doesn’t simply mean missions such as mission projects and teams that we support locally and around the world. Missional is a word that means all of God’s people called and sent. Jesus said, “As the father sent me, so send I you.” That’s missional—to be engaged in the mission of God—the people of God doing the work of God. The mission of God summarized in a single concept: Be a blessing!

It seems to me that there are three facets of this missional mandate, three ways our Lord would have us pass his blessings on to others. We see that Jesus showed up in the lives of people, spoke up into their lives and stood up on behalf of their lives. We bless people when we show up, we bless people when we speak up and we bless people when we stand up. We bless people when we show up. As Psalm 46 describes our God: “Our God is a very present help in time of trouble.” I love the “very” part—a very present help. This is the Lord who shows up—and you bless people when you show up in their lives. When my Mom died the funeral was held in the private Ott Cemetery in a rural area two hours north of New Orleans. So, only members of our immediate and extended family gathered for the memorial service. Glancing out the window, I was shocked to see Paul Thwaite walking up the sidewalk. Paul and I had worked together for some years; he and his wife, Jan, are dear friends. He is six feet eight inches tall, so it’s difficult to miss him. I have no idea what Paul said. No memory of it whatsoever. But I will never ever forget the overwhelming feeling of affection and appreciation when he showed up that day. So show up. The key to care is “be there.” And if
We bless people when we speak up with words of blessing, with words of encouragement and words of faith.

you can’t show up physically, show up by phone or text or note. When you show up, you pass God’s blessing into the life of another person.

We also bless people when we speak up. While I am a fan of the great Saint Francis of Assisi, I have never appreciated the famous words attributed to him: “Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary use words.” I get what he is saying. How we live speaks volumes about the Lord who loves us to others. But people today take what Francis said to mean that it is okay not to speak, and that is not okay. We bless people when we speak up with words of blessing, with words of encouragement and words of faith. Job’s friend Eliphaz said to Job, “Your words have put people on their feet!” Do your words pick people up or put people down? The blessing of Isaac on his sons, Jacob and Esau, was a verbal blessing. Do your words speak of the wonder of the Lord who loves you? You bless people when you speak with words of encouragement and faith.

I know a few years ago I shared with you that when our son, Lee, graduated from high school, I started thinking that the father of the prodigal son waited until the son came home before bringing out the fatted calf. I thought, "Why wait? Why not bless and send Lee that same way now?" I went to a butcher and brought home five thick juicy steaks and we had a feast. Then our family gathered around Lee and laid hands on him. Appropriate touch is very much a part of blessing. After everyone had prayed for Lee, for my blessing I prayed:

Lord, May Lee know who he is and Whose he is,

May he know that wherever he goes You are sending him, that you have a purpose in his being there,

May he remain true to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

And now bless Lee and keep him; make Your face to shine upon him and be gracious to him.

The Lord turn his face toward him and give him peace.

I don't mind telling you, it was very emotional. It was also powerful. That child left knowing he was blessed and he was sent. Remember, there is a big difference between leaving and being sent. To leave means to no longer be a part of. To be sent is to go out on behalf of, to go with a mission, to look forward to a return. And in the same manner, we blessed Lindsay and Shelley, and you may bless those in your household that way, also.

Our own kids and grandkids all gathered in June for a week of vacation and fun. I played for them a recording of a dinner conversation we had thirty years ago in which Ann Marie and I introduced the idea of
We bless people when we show up, we bless people when we speak up and we bless people when we stand up, that is when we stand up for what is right in the face of some form of injustice.

“The Blessing Cup.” The Blessing Cup is a special cup set aside only for this purpose. For our family, it’s a chalice made of wood. When something special happened to one of us, perhaps a graduation or a good grade or a birthday, we would fill the Blessing Cup with something like apple juice. Each person in turn receiving the cup would say why the special person is a blessing, takes a sip and passes the cup. After the circle was complete, we held hands and prayed around the table, thanking our Lord for the blessing this person was to us. When the family passes the Blessing Cup today, thirty years later, it stuns me how we learned to affirm one another and to affirm that the one who actually does the blessing behind it all is the God who loves us. You might give the Blessing Cup a try in your home. It’s a great way to speak up in the lives of those you love.

We bless people when we show up, we bless people when we speak up and we bless people when we stand up, that is when we stand up for what is right in the face of some form of injustice. If people are being devalued in your home, school system, neighborhood, place of employment, community, do you stand up for what is right? When the prophet Daniel learned King Nebuchadnezzar had sentenced Daniel and the wise men to death, we read he went to the captain of the guard with “discretion and discernment.” In other words, he stood up, not with an angry off-putting spirit but with an approach that helped address the situation.

When we moved into our house in Pittsburgh, our daughter Shelley was five years old. I discovered our lawn was half grass and half dandelions, so I bought some Roundup. I was happily bopping them off, one-by-one around the yard to Shelley’s increasing distress at my treatment of those dandelions. I came to a giant one that was at the corner between the driveway and the street. Suddenly, I found myself looking into the eyes of a small, blond girl as Shelley had interposed herself between the dandelion and me. With crossed arms she said, “Stop. Jesus wouldn’t do it!” Wow. She not only stood up, she stood up in the name of Jesus. That dandelion enjoyed a long and prosperous life in the sight of all. When you stand up, you bless those upon whose behalf you stand.

Be sent on the missional mandate of our Lord to show up, to speak up and to stand up in the lives of the people around you. Amen!