

## Blessing of The Ground Instructions

The Blessing service for September 6 is going to be the Blessing of the Ground. If you've never heard of that before, it's because I've just invented it. So, I want to describe what will happen if you come to the outdoor service, and then I'll provide some instructions on how you can do it from wherever you are if you can't come to the church but want to participate.

The focus for this Sunday will be on the way God has blessed us through the gifts that come from the ground—the food we eat, the trees that give us shade and produce oxygen, the plants that provide medicine, the rocks that we use to build, the ground itself that provides a foundation for our buildings, the soil that nourishes our gardens, the grass on which we play and picnic—all that and more. To show our gratitude for those gifts, we will return a gift of blessing. But how?

To begin with, masks are mandatory for all gatherings in Massachusetts if you're over the age of two. So, wear yours and practice social distancing both when we are seated and when we start moving around. For all of these services you'll need to bring a mask, a chair, and your own communion elements.

Specifically, for the Blessing of the Ground, we're also asking everyone who comes to bring non-perishable food items for the Food Pantry. Then we'll gather outside the front of the church, and celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. We'll have one of our nursery attendants to watch children in the playground if you would like to take advantage of that, but children are also more than welcome to participate in the regular service.

After Communion I'll recap the instructions here and then we'll do the blessing itself, which will involve moving around the property for those who are able. For this you'll need to bring something to carry water. It could be a cup, a pitcher, a pail—nothing too big, and we'll have some extra cups if needed. We'll have some larger buckets of water placed at various points around the church property. You'll go find one of those, fill your water container, and then search for a patch of ground anywhere on the church property that you would like to bless.

It might be a tree or plant, or it could just be a sad little patch of brown grass. The point of the exercise is to be mindful—to actively notice the ground and everything that's growing from it and see it afresh as something that God made and called "good." The point is to remember that human beings are not the only sacred things on the earth and to remember that the very first job given to human beings in Genesis 2:15 was to serve and protect the earth. We will be serving as a channel of God's blessing to the particular section of earth that provides the foundation for our church property.

Once you've found a spot, pour out your water with the words, "May this water bless and keep you, and may you be everything God created for you to be." You can pour out all the water or you can visit several spots and pour out a bit in each spot. Or you can pour it all out and return to the larger buckets for more. Whatever moves you. If you've done Jessica's craft project to make an aspergillum to use for sprinkling water, you can dip that into your cup and distribute the water that way. Check her video to see how to make one or you can download the written instructions from the church website. If you want to spend a moment to say your own prayer at the spot, that is also welcome.

If you want to remember the thing you have blessed with a picture, Jessica has made some lightweight selfie frames—some say Blessed, others say Crawford, and some say nothing at all. We'll have them available for all the Blessing services, so feel free to pick one up to use in a photo if you'd like. If mobility is a problem for you, there will be people to help you either by walking with you to a special spot or by going to a place you direct to pour out water on your behalf.

When you're finished, come back to the front of the church and we'll close with a benediction.

So, to review, plan to bring these things to the service:

1. Your mask
2. Non-perishable food for the Food Pantry
3. A chair
4. If the weather looks iffy, bring an umbrella or rain gear.
5. Your own communion elements
6. A cup, pitcher, or pail to carry the water

So that's what will happen on the church grounds. If you can't get here, all of the above can be modified for your circumstances. For Communion, you can do it together with us on the live stream, which will be shown on both YouTube and Facebook. That livestream will be recorded, so you can also watch it later if you're not available at 10 am. If you want to contribute something to the Food Pantry, you can bring it by the church on another day or maybe ask someone to drop it off for you. If you're in a tough spot and need the food yourself, then simply bless it as you eat.

For the blessing segment, you can fill a cup with water at your house or, if you're feeling crafty, you can make the aspergillum Jessica describes. If you have someplace outside you can get to, you can take your water to a spot there. Maybe you don't have a yard with lots of grass and trees, but just a small, bare patch of dirt may be crying out for more blessing than a lush yard. Or maybe there are weeds growing up in-between cracks in the pavement. There was no day in creation where God made "weeds." If it's alive and has managed to break through asphalt or cement, it sure could use a blessing! Or maybe there's a houseplant you would like to bless.

And if there's no bit of ground either inside or outside where you are, then simply say the blessing the next time you eat a meal and thank God for the ground. Without it there would be no food to eat.

And if you haven't seen it already, make sure you watch the video "Why We Bless Things" to understand why we're doing these first Sunday Blessing services at all. We like to think that the world will change through big sweeping actions at the top. Maybe so. But I believe we also can change the world from the bottom up—with millions of people, from the youngest toddler to the most aged among us, one blessing at a time.

In closing, I invite you to watch this beautiful video, shot and produced by our own Shota Weaver from locations around New England. Let Shota's work bless you and may it prepare your soul to give back a blessing to the ground.