

**Introduction:**

- A. Illus.: I came across this article by Chris Erskine in the *Chicago Tribune* a couple weeks ago. It begins:

*By any measure, the Pacific Crest Trail is a beastly thing, an angry anaconda that slithers up the entire length of California and all the way to Canada, some 2,650 rugged miles. That's approximately 6 million steps — some of them glorious, many of them merciless.*

Sounds like life, doesn't it? Countless rugged miles. More steps than you can count. Some glorious. Many merciless.

- B. There's an old spiritual that sings, *"I'm a trampin', trampin', tryin' to make heaven my home."* Some of us are loving the journey right now but others are dispirited, worried, and weary. The article says, *"Then there are those endless granite staircases. In the Sierra alone, there are nine passes of 10,000 feet or more."* Some of you are filled with regrets and guilt and others wonder, "What did I do to deserve this!?"
- C. In our Bible passage today we step back into the company of the Jews in around 475 BC. Their trail has been pretty tough. Because of Israel's relentless sin, the parents and grandparents of these people had been crushed by enemies and carried into captivity for 70 years—a lifetime. When these people returned to Jerusalem from exile, they returned to rubble and struggle. They rebuilt God's temple but it was nothing as grand as their old-timers remembered. They got life going again but they were a shadow of their former selves. They had no king or standing. Their glory days were 500 years behind them; their national salvation story—the Exodus—had been 1000 years earlier. They were in danger of forgetting who they were—the people of God. A hard trail will do that to you.

- D. The *Tribune* article said, “*That’s approximately 6 million steps — some of them glorious, many of them merciless. But along the way, mercy is at hand.*” So it was for those road-weary Jews, and so it is for us. You might think that there was some wonderful new thing that came into their lives—some miracle or victory or bright new era. But that’s not what happened. Life continued along, ordinary and difficult. But God spoke to them in that time, through prophets like Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, and through a very special history teacher—the Chronicler. He took Israel’s stories, recorded in 1&2 Samuel and 1&2 Kings and excerpted parts that the Jews especially needed in order to remember who they were. Turn to **2 Chron. 6. When God wants to encourage us to trust him on the trail he always takes us back to the promises he’s made and kept.**
- E. Last Sunday Pastor Michael took you to 2 Chron 2-5 where we’re told how Solomon built the temple for the LORD that his father David planned. By modern standards, the outside was a small building with a simple exterior. But the inside! Gold from top to bottom inlaid with precious stones. Two huge golden cherubim—angels—whose combined wingspans were 30 ft. After it was built, the culmination was bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the Most Holy Place. The ark was a gold-covered wooden box containing the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments. It was about 500 years old and it was *the* symbol of Israel’s relationship with God. God’s covenant with them was that he would bless them in every way and they would love and obey him.
- After the priests had positioned the ark under the wings of the cherubim and drawn the heavy blue, purple and crimson curtain they left the temple. Try to imagine this scene: **2 Chron. 5:11-6:2...**

Solomon stood on a bronze platform watching and hearing all this, with “the whole assembly of Israel” behind him. We cannot

imagine what it was like when the glory of the LORD filled the temple but God was so close, so real, that they must have felt as though they were on the threshold of heaven itself. And then Solomon turned. **V.3:** “*While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them.*” He didn’t turn and waggle his finger at them and say, “*This is who you’re dealing with so you’d better behave!*” No, he “*blessed them.*” And what did he say? I assume he blessed them just as Moses had instructed Aaron to bless them 500 years earlier. Moses had said, “*This is how you are to bless the Israelites.*”

*The LORD bless you  
and keep you;  
the LORD make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you;  
the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you peace.*

I love this part! No matter where we are on the trail, even when we feel like nobodies, God reminds us that we are blessed to be his people. So no matter where you are on the journey...

## **I. LIVE UNDER THE BLESSING OF THE LORD’S NAME (6:3)**

- A. As I mentioned to you a couple weeks ago, this great priestly blessing—also called the Aaronic blessing—was their birthright as the people of God, just as it is ours. This was their inheritance. This was who they were, and who we are. Moses told Aaron, “*So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.*” That’s what this blessing does—**it puts the LORD’s name on you**. Three times: *The LORD ... The LORD... The LORD ...* And in his name we his people receive these six everlasting treasures:
1. *Bless you* - the outpouring of God’s goodness on us
  2. *Keep you* - protection, “*I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress.’*”
  3. *Make his face shine upon you* – Dallas Willard suggest you think of a grandparent with their new grandbaby. It is the delight of God over us. Zephaniah says God rejoices over us with singing!
  4. *Be gracious unto you* – He forgives all our sins and crowns us with love and compassion.

5. *Turn his face toward you* – we have his undivided attention. David wrote in **Ps 139** that God’s thoughts about us are vast—outnumbering the grains of sand.
  6. *And give you peace.* Rest and richness and satisfaction. Jesus promised us, not the peace the world gives, but peace that passes all understanding.
- B. According to Lev. 9:22, Aaron “*lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them.*” I assume that is what Solomon did as well. It is a wonderful gesture—hands over you like the name of the LORD. There is a parallel scene to this right at the end of Luke. “*When [Jesus] had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.*” And it is under that blessing that we wait for Jesus to return just as he was left. I think Jesus, High Priest that he is, said the same thing in blessing as Aaron and all the priests; the same as David when he brought the Ark to Jerusalem, and the same as Solomon when he dedicated the Temple.

This is our birthright, too. This great God, whose glory now is within and among us, wants his name put over us with these promises. I mentioned this at the end of the service a couple weeks ago and Katerina came up afterward and said, “*I have always heard the blessing at the end of the service, but this time the word birthright really got my attention. It changed the way I listened and received the blessing.*” She went on, “*It made me feel so special. I saw myself like a child just born to a King, now entitled to her Father’s riches. Thank you for saying that!*”

- C. There is this one thing we must do: we must **receive this blessing.** We must trust it, draw it around us, take it with us on the trail. I’ve noticed that some of you, when I pronounce the blessing, hold your hands out, palms out, to help you remember to receive your birthright. Good idea!

In **vv.4-11** Solomon praises God for two great gifts—two promises kept... The Chronicler was saying to *his* beleaguered people and us, even when the trail is difficult...

## II. PRAISE THE LORD THAT THE SON OF DAVID RULES OVER US, HIS PEOPLE (6:4-11)

- A. We serve a greater Son than Solomon. Five hundred years had passed since Solomon but those Jews to whom the Chronicler wrote still kept careful track of their genealogies. Even though they had no king, they knew who among them were descended from David because they clung to the hope that one day there would be another King, their Messiah. The genealogies we read in Matthew and Luke march backwards right through these people all the way back to David. Now we have that great King in Jesus.
- B. The promise was of a son who would *“rule my people Israel.”* You see it there in **vv.5-6.** The rule of Christ, the Son of David, is fixed on bring those six blessings of God to his people. He is our champion. All that God gives us in our birthright, Jesus secured for us through his death, resurrection and ascension. Paul wrote in **2 Cor 1:20**, *“No matter how many promises God has made they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”* Jesus is the guarantor of our God-blessed life.

## III. PRAISE THE LORD THAT WE ARE THE TEMPLE FOR HIS NAME.

- A. Remember, this whole occasion surrounded the bringing of the ark of the covenant into the new temple. Solomon said in **v.11**, *“There I have placed the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with the people of Israel.”* Israel had been exiled by God because they didn’t keep their side of that covenant. Solomon’s temple had been destroyed and the ark taken from them because they broke the covenant. It was gone. And yet here is the Chronicler retelling this story—as if to say, whether or not you have the ark, God’s covenant to bless you still stands.

For us, we lay hold of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper: *“This blood is the new covenant in my blood.”* This covenant is not carved on stone tablets but written into our hearts so that those who are saved by the blood of Jesus have the Holy Spirit within urging and helping us toward holy lives.

- B. Six times these few verses speak of the temple as the place for the LORD's Name—his identity. *I Am Who I Am*. Here is where you can find him. In the prayer to follow, Solomon prays that when people of other nations come to this temple God will hear and answer their prayers. God's name dwells in us and we here together are a "house of prayer" where others can meet and know the living God
- C. Jesus stood on that same site, in virtually the same place where Solomon stood, and said, "*Destroy this temple, and will raise it again in three days.*" But he meant his body, for his body housed God. And when he rose from the dead he arose with a new body—a new temple—in two senses of the word. The Bible says that we, the church, are his Body. And **Eph. 2:22** says "*We are being built together to become a dwelling in which Christ lives by his Spirit.*" So no matter how tough the trail is for you, praise God that he lives in your and in us as his people. He has not given up on us, and he has not left us alone. **Remember who you are!**

## Conclusion

Sometimes our lives are as tough as that Pacific Crest Trail. "*But along the way, mercy is at hand.*" God's mercy to us rests in his promises made and kept—the promise of our birthright, the LORD's name put over us in blessing, the promise of our King, who has come to reveal the glory of God and is coming again, and the promise of the temple—incredibly, that *we are God's temple*, more glorious than the golden walls of Solomon's temple.

Illus.: I didn't tell you that the article I read in the *Tribune* focused on the people who take it upon themselves to help the hikers on that grueling trail. They open their homes for the weary travelers. They provide meals, mail service and help. They're called "**trail angels**."

We aren't the only ones on this hard trail, but many whom we know do not have the promises God has given us. We can be their 'trail angels.' We are emphasizing at VCL that we are *Home*. Those 'trail angels' have the kinds of homes we want to be as a church. After all, what good is our wonderful home if we don't

take in weary, disheartened travelers? The article said, “*But along the way, mercy is at hand.*”

Illus.: **Donna Saufley** and her husband “*set up tents and a trailer to handle the spring crush.*” She calls their home, “Hiker Heaven.” According to the article, “*She talks fondly about the payoffs of being a trail angel: witnessing the hikers' emerging humanity, their grit, their brio and the inevitable baring of souls.* Traveling the trail “*is humbling,*” she says. “*I compare it to the peeling of an onion. You see people for what they are.*” Like the church.

She and her husband will host 1200 people this year in their ordinary home. They don't take any money. She says, “*I always say that it's a river of life that washes up to my shore.*” The article says, “*She loves it when her sanctuary is filled with hikers. [She says,] 'The sounds of conversations mingling with music and laughter is divine to my ear.'*”

I know what she means, don't you? That's what happens here in our home with the people of God.

God has made us his people—his home—so let us be like these ‘trail angels’ to the people around us.

[*Chicago Tribune*, 1/5/15, “‘Trail angels’ help keep hikers on track,” by Chris Erskine.  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/la-sp-c1-trail-angels-20141230-column.html#page=1>]

## **Prayer of Praise – Based on 2 Chron. 6:4-11**

1/18/15

### *Aaronic blessing*

Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, the God of the church of Jesus Christ, who with his hands has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth.

We praise you, Lord, that you brought your people up out of Egypt's slavery and death, and that, even more glorious, you brought us up out of slavery and death through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You promised King David that his Son would one day reign over your people forever and ever, and you have fulfilled that promise through Jesus the Messiah, who rules over us. We praise you for giving us such a King who guarantees every one of your promises to us, who is the Pioneer of our immortality, who is both our Elder Brother and Bridegroom. We praise you that there is no other King to whom we must bow; that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and that one day all creation will join us in praising him.

Who is able to build a temple for our God, who is greater than all other gods, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? Solomon could not, yet you filled the temple he built with your glory. But Jesus was the very embodiment of your glory and he came to dwell among us. Jesus' body was the Temple of God. Then he made *us*, his people, to be his Body. We praise you that Jesus is our Cornerstone and we, like living stones, are being built as the dwelling place of the LORD.

We praise you for the New Covenant in your blood, guaranteeing our salvation, everlasting life, and our eternal fellowship with you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We praise you, O LORD that you have put your name over us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.