

“You Are Blessed” based on John 20:19-31 5/1/11

When was the last time that you found yourself giving someone a blessing? Was it at a baptism? A Confirmation event? A graduation? A wedding? An appreciation dinner? A retirement party? An anniversary?

Two weeks ago we celebrated Palm Sunday, the day in which Jesus entered Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, accompanied by the enthusiastic shouts of the Jewish crowds. And we recall the words with which the people gave honor and praise to Jesus: **“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”** Today in the post-resurrection story of Jesus’ appearances to the disciples and Thomas, Jesus directs words of honor and praise toward us with this declaration: **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”**

As we look at our Bible from its beginning to its end, we see that in the ancient Near East, giving blessings of various kinds was a part of the culture. Blessings were regularly integrated into the worship experiences of the Jewish people. An example is found in Num. 6:22-27: **“The Lord said to Moses, ‘(Tell) Aaron and his sons (to bless the people with these words): ‘The Lord bless you and keep you: the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.’” So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”** When God called Abraham to leave his home country and go to a new land that God would show him, God said: **“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”** Another common practice in the Jewish culture was the blessing of a son by his father, whereby the father passed on his property and authority to the next generation.

Today, I would like to suggest that even as we are **People of the Resurrection** because we serve a Risen Savior, that in light of today’s Scripture, we also consider ourselves to be **People of Blessing**. For just as Jesus blessed the disciples with his risen presence and helped Thomas overcome his doubt, so Jesus also promised a blessing to all those who wouldn’t have the opportunity to see him in his risen state, but yet would believe that he truly rose to life again.

This past Friday I had the opportunity to give the invocation at the annual regional meeting of Altrusa at the Holiday Inn Convention Center. The mayor of Marshfield followed me with words of welcome to the attendees. He spoke with great enthusiasm about our city. He complemented the work done by individuals and groups in the community, affirming that the City Council depends on the support of the people in order to accomplish the goals that have been set. Twice he invited the out-of-town attendees to take a look around the city before going home to view the projects completed by Marshfield residents. Was he blessing the people of the city of Marshfield by his comments--giving them honor and praise? I think we know that the answer is “yes”!

Earlier in the John’s Gospel, chap. 10, Jesus says: **“I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... and...I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”** Jesus came to earth to be a blessing to us and to the world—the goodness of which is beyond what we can measure. It is like what the Psalmist describes in Psalm 23, when he says: **“My cup overflows.”** It is through Jesus’ blessing that we have the gift of eternal life, meaning that we have a relationship with Jesus now and always. And it’s this relationship that empowers us to live our life as a blessing to others.

Too often we hear people speaking in ways that are totally opposite of bringing a blessing to others. One example is our recent political campaigns with their accompanying ads which left a lot to be desired, and which created a sense of emotional weariness in our hearts as they were presented to us again and again on TV. Indeed, the letter of James in the New Testament sets forth some strong ethical guidelines on how Christians are meant to live, particularly in terms of their speech, for in chapter 3:10 the author writes: **“With (our tongue) we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse our fellow-men, who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, this should not happen.”**

Instead, in Matthew 5, where we find the Beatitudes of Jesus, Jesus uses his tongue to describe the blessedness of those who seek to live in the ways of his Kingdom, and in doing that, Jesus encourages us to take the narrow path. For he calls blessed those who know their need of God; those who are mourning losses and their own human weakness; those who are meek, who use their strength appropriately; those who wholeheartedly seek right relationships; those who express mercy in the world; those who have God as the focal point of their lives; those who are peacemakers and reconcilers; and those who continue to do what is right even though they may suffer for it.

Jesus came to earth to be a blessing to us and to the world and to lift all of us up into the ways of his Kingdom, so that we also might be a blessing to others in the world, and especially to those who do not know the grace and mercy of God.

The Old Testament prophet Amos, during his time of appointment as a prophet to God's people, gave them this message from God: **“Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”** In the same way, the Lord calls us to let blessings flow, on-goingly, from our hearts and lips, and through the works of our hands.

And so as we move forward into each new day, we can make this question a part of our morning devotions: “How can I bring a blessing today? to the culture at large? to my community and my church? How can I bring a blessing to the members of my family? For in considering and acting on these questions you'll find that you will be blessing God, and you will also be blessed by God.

In I Corinthians 2:9 we hear these words of the Apostle Paul: **“...as the Scripture says, ‘What no one ever saw or heard, what no one every thought could happen, is the very thing God prepared for those who love him.’”** While we have not seen Jesus with our physical eyes, we see him with the eyes of faith. And God promises blessings to those who seek him, believe in him, and follow him without having seen him.

Thanks be to God. Amen.