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“ Blessed Are the Visionaries”

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Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. John 20:29-31

**Blessed:** Are you blessed?

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

You are blessed if you believe in Jesus and the risen Christ. To be blessed means 'to be favoured by God'. Blessings are directly associated with God and come from God.

Faith is easiest when we are surrounded by good things. But when we're tired and discouraged and lonely and still believe God is real and cares- that's the blessing Christ is expressing. What a good place to be- aware that God is on our side when it seems like life is against us. Or when we look at others'. Why does God let that stuff happen?

“When we don't understand,

When we can't see his plan,

When we can't trace his hand- trust his heart.”

Being blessed is a gift of the Holy Spirit. We are blessed when we live by faith not sight. When we see new possibilities- having hope. *Blessed* is sometimes translated “happy”. Being blessed is more than being happy. Being blessed means that we know, we have faith, that we are loved by God! And with being blessed comes the mandate from God to make a difference in this world. We are “blessed to be a blessing.”

Isaiah 61:8-9 “For I the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward *my* people and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed.”

Jesus' disciples were sad and anxious before seeing the risen Christ. He gave peace and defines them (and us) as blessed. God's love is big enough to be gracious to us even when we doubt like Thomas did.

I've read the book, *The Shack*, by William P. Young. Some of you have read it and some have read it and didn't like it! The book is a work of fiction but it has some incredible truths within its pages. Mack is the main character, a man who has had a terrible loss in his life. Mack struggles with what he calls The Great Sadness. The death of his daughter has overwhelmed his emotional life and destroyed his faith. Throughout the story Mack questions God, and hears the depth and breadth of God's love for him and for the entire world.

God says over and over again, "I am especially fond of him." "I am especially fond of her." "I am especially fond of you." In the book, in a discussion with Jesus, Mack asks: "So why do I have so much fear in my life? Jesus says, "Because you don't believe. You don't know that we love you. The person who lives by their fears will not find freedom in my love. ... You neither believe I am good, nor know deep in your heart that I love you. You sing about it; you talk about, but you don't know it." Because when we start looking through the eyes of God at ourselves and at others – we see and know that God has uniquely gifted each person on this earth. If we can see the risen Christ we can see we are **blessed**.

### **ARE:**

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

"Are" is a present tense form of the verb "to be". Are you living in the present?

In the context of the verse "are" implies that the blessing is for us, as we live, here and now! When we believe -we can be happy now, and fulfilled now. Enjoying life now, fruitful now, action people, now.

If we can see that Christ has overcome what we can not control- death, then we can see that we are blessed now. If we can believe, if we have faith, we are blessed, right now.

I don't know about you. What lessons have you learned about living and enjoying the blessings of God right now? Somehow I came to believe that life was to be endured, not enjoyed. For a very long time I believed that our joy would be later- in heaven, not here and now.

I think I became a fatalist because of the revolving door at the funeral homes. I lived through a lot of deaths in my early teen years. All four of my grandparents, 2 favorite uncles, and my own father all died within a few years. I became chronically sad, like Mackenzie in "The Shack". And I learned to live that way. I got used to a distorted faith that said "life is always hard, but heaven will be worth the pain of this life."

But God has a better idea than that. Jesus said "I came that people may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10). It's not an isolated text. God wants us to have a pleasant life. We read in Ecclesiastes 3 that "there is nothing better for us than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we live;" that it is God's gift that we "should eat and drink and take pleasure in all our toil".

From *prison* Paul wrote the church in Philippi to think about all the good things of life! The things that surround us that are: true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy! Doesn't sound like we will be blessed later, but that if we open our eyes we will see so many blessings that we already have. Life is good. "Blessed **are** those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

"Let There Be Peace on Earth" is a song by Jill Jackson Miller and Sy Miller that was written in 1955. (I wouldn't have guessed that it was that old.) Jill had been suicidal after a divorce. She wrote the song after "discovering what she called the life-saving joy of 'God's peace and unconditional love.'" The second verse is especially poignant for those of us who tend to worry about the future or regret the past.

"Let peace begin with me,  
 Let this be the moment now;  
 With every step I take, Let this be my solemn vow:  
 To take each moment and live each moment,  
 In peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth  
 And let it begin with me."

### The VISIONARIES-

"Blessed are those who *have not seen and yet have come to believe.*"

Do you believe in things that can't be proven? Jesus is saying that WE are blessed because we live by faith and not by sight. Christian believers *have* to live with their hearts, not by their heads. We are visionaries. People of "unusually keen foresight", as the word is defined. That's US! We see our future- we know- it's whatever God wants. I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future!

Jonathan Swift, 1667–1745, an Anglo-Irish author, poet and cleric who is remembered for Gulliver's Travels, wrote: "Vision is the art of seeing things invisible."

We "see" with our eyes and our brains, but we "have vision" with our hearts and minds.

One of my favorite chapters in the Bible has always been II Corinthians 4. While it did support my living for the future instead of in the present, it also ends with this helpful explanation of vision: "... we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also ... because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal." (2 Cor. 4:14, 18)

So "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" is also saying- blessed are those who believe what they didn't witness, for they are seeing with eyes of faith. They see the invisible.

Seeing with eyes of faith is a common theme in the gospel and letters attributed to John. John wrote what he saw so that we, who did not get the opportunity to see with our own eyes, can believe. John wrote the passage I'm considering today: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." He also wrote "the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory". How do you "see" glory? John wrote- Jesus said: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father". Really? Or more likely, seen with eyes of faith?

In the First Letter of John (1:1-3) we read: “what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us- we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our (or your) joy may be complete.”

So if we see with eyes of faith, we believe the words of the witnesses. We see those invisible realities that surround us, and we become visionaries. Helen Keller who was blind, but blessed with incredible insight, said “It is a terrible thing to see and have no vision.”

Bobby Kennedy was quoting George Bernard Shaw, an Irish playwright of the late 1800s when he said “Some see things as they are and say why- I dream things that never were and say why not.” When we see the struggles around us-we ask “why”. When we have hopeful vision, we ask: “why not tackle this problem?” Let it begin with me.

Robert Kennedy did say: “Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, these ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Like our senior high youth, let’s watch for the ripples! If we use faith and vision together we can make a difference in our world. Isn’t that what being a Christian means? Reinhold Neibuhr, an American theologian in the WWII era describes the kind of visionary I’d like to be:

“Leaders are visionaries, with a poorly developed sense of fear, and no concept of the odds against them. They make things happen... Visionaries work to fix the world, but do not despair as many idealists do because they realize the work is bigger than themselves”.

Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

We **Are** so **Blessed** to **See** the love of God expressed by the cross, and to **envision the** power of God, demonstrated by the resurrection. Having access to that power we can live a life that is joyful and abundant; as visionaries. Let it begin with me. Amen.