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2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:14-29

The Apostle Paul has been known as one who had a way with words. He seemed to be able to describe spiritual realities that for other people may have been undecipherable.

For example, in speaking of the togetherness of Christians, he spoke of the “Body of Christ” where we are all knit together in one communion of love and service. St. Paul seemed to have the ability to put in words what most people would designate as beyond words. And Paul, more often than not, writes of spiritual realities. Since he consistently writes on that level, it is somewhat typical that the average reader would be appreciative of the beauty of Paul's words, and yet feel somewhat inadequate in being able to comprehend the meaning of the words.

In First Corinthians he said, **Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** In Philippians he said, **Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.**

Today's epistle from Ephesians finds Paul writing about spiritual blessings. He begins by saying, **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.**

In other words he is speaking of how we as followers of Christ are blessed with many spiritual blessings. Later he speaks of the **riches of God's grace which he lavished on us**. In Paul's thinking the riches of God's grace, spiritual blessings, did not just come to light as they were discovered by someone. But in our spiritual lives these blessings, these riches are bestowed upon us as we grow in Christ, and as we grow in awareness of our spiritual lives.

So, it is conceivable that a person would have a spiritual blessing at one point in a life that at one time had not been the case, because spiritual blessings are always being bestowed. Out of Paul's poetic words on spiritual blessings and the riches of grace there is a question that appears and begs to be noticed.

Why does God bestow upon us these spiritual blessings? The answer which is implied through the whole of today's epistle is that God's love for us is unbounded. Therefore, God's generosity towards us is unbounded. In addition, he says we were **chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love**. Further, Paul says, **God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will freely bestowed on us in the Beloved**. The reference to the Beloved refers to Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on to use such words as forgiveness, redemption, and a spiritual inheritance. And the reader may be uplifted by Paul's words that are about God's generosity and love. But at the same time the reader may be somewhat mystified by the use of theological terms. And thus there is the somewhat typical feeling of being uplifted by Paul's words, but also mystified by them.

And if Paul were here in the flesh, and we wanted to thank him, we might say "thank you." And if he asked what specifically what we were thanking him for, we might not know.

And I think Paul knew that. I think he knew that his readers would be warmed, but at the same time mystified. And I think he knew that if he was going to rely on his readers' understanding alone, then they would always be destined to be warmed but mystified.

And so he speaks of the Beloved, of Jesus Christ. He says that all this generosity, all these spiritual blessings are bestowed on us in a person, Jesus Christ. And it is our contact with Jesus that brings understanding and comprehension.

Another person in scripture who seemed to radiate through her words was the Virgin Mary. When she was visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she would bear the Christ child, she uttered the words that became known as the Magnificat: **My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.**

Did you ever meet someone who profoundly affected you just because of their demeanor? Did you ever meet someone who affected you just because of their loving presence? I recall Betty McKibben. Even on her deathbed she had that demeanor, that loving presence that stirred my heart and filled it with gratitude for her life.

I can recall many times after being with Betty that I would think to myself, "When I grow up, I want to be just like her." And then I would chuckle to myself and say, "If I grow up, I want to be just like her." When I think of spiritual blessings and the riches of God's grace, I think of Betty. And I hope she knew just how much I enjoyed being around her. And so when I was around her I was stirred by her graciousness, her joy. And so somehow in that enjoyment of her presence there was a growing comprehension of the spiritual blessing of her life.

And I think that is the meaning of Paul's words about the Beloved. In essence he is saying that appreciation of the presence of Christ brings with it an understanding about spiritual blessings and the riches of God's grace. That was certainly true of Betty McKibben. I expect it was true of the Apostle Paul. And Paul says it was true of Jesus Christ, the Beloved.

I think we must never assume that every person who embodies spiritual blessings was just born that way. For every person who radiates spiritual blessings at points in their lives has said "yes" to the generosity of God. It was nothing that God forced on them.

In essence it is a combination of the generosity of God and the willingness of a person to be loved in that way and to live in that way.

Some things to ponder:

Do you think we could enjoy spiritual blessedness among ourselves here more?

Do you think that we could be more spiritually blessed in our lives? There is no question that God says "yes" to us because of the boundlessness of God's generosity.

But would we say "yes" more to God's generosity? Would you be a spiritual blessing for someone else? In dealing with the generosity of God, it is not primarily about comprehension and being smart. It is primarily about being open to being blessed more and more. If we are open and more open, then we will know a joy and a spiritual blessedness. We will enjoy that ourselves, and we will be that for others. And we will joyfully resonate with the words of the Virgin Mary when she said, **My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.** Amen.