

Speaking the Truth in Love – Blessings in Disguise

Acts 4:1-7, 16-22, Eph 4:14-15

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as you know Valleyview has been riding the blessing train for the past three months now.

We have been blessed to go out and bless others, and we still have funds left to use for this project – so if you have not done it yet... you're not off the hook – I'll be following up with you over the next couple of weeks.

And as I mentioned last week, the Lord is really using this to shape – or reshape us as a church – and so the teaching ministry in our worship services over the past three months has focused on how to be the Blessing, how overcome hesitancy or reluctance that we might have about going out and blessing someone in the name of Jesus.

And we've looked at how small blessings – like \$100 in cash – can turn into and lead to discipleship opportunities and thus how discipleship is a blessing as well.

And we have heard from the Lord in scripture about how He wants to Bless us and how that can change our hearts and bring restoration in our lives and that lead us into our celebration of Thanksgiving last Sunday – to give thanks for all these blessings, and to learn more about what be Blessed means.

And I have to say that one of the great things that has come out of this project is hearing you share about what you've done to bless others and how it always ends up blessing you as well – and when we hear that - it blesses us.

So, while the goal of this project is to bless others – and not ourselves – God's goodness is such that when we do this, we get a blessing back to us as well... most of the time.

Now I'm not saying this to discourage you from going out and continuing to engage in this initial stage of blessing others. I'm saying it because as we continue to grow in our ability to go out and bless others – and as we grow in our understanding of how that leads into discipleship – and what

discipleship entails... we will eventually encounter situations where people will not receive the further blessings of discipleship that we are offering - as the church of Jesus Christ – positively - as a blessing.

Instead they might be offended, or they might be upset, or they might be angry, or they might accuse us of harming them with our blessing.

And its not because we were careless or patronizing or condescending in how we offered the blessing to them – although that can happen and that’s why its very important that we pay attention to the Apostle Peter’s teaching in his first letter, in 3:15, that when we bless others – especially with the answers that we have for the hope within us, that we do so *“with gentleness and respect.”*

But the truth is brothers and sisters that no matter how gentle and respectful we are in our attempts to bless someone – sometimes there is an unavoidable confrontation that takes place because we are blessing people IN Jesus name.

And Jesus is Lord, He is King, He is God and that tends to bring out the rebellious side of our sinful human nature...

And Jesus is the Healer, forgiver of Sins and the giver of New life and that tends to make us a bit self conscious and defensive about ourselves and react like there’s nothing wrong with us, we don’t need any help and our life is just fine thankyou.

And Jesus is the new and improved human being, which implies that there is something defective with the rest of us human beings.

Do you know what I mean here brothers and sisters??

And because these are all aspects of the spiritual reality and the spiritual battle that goes on around us – we don’t even have to be explaining all these details about Jesus as we are blessing someone in order for His name to cause a reaction.

You see scripture tells us in 1 John 5:19 that the world is under the power of the evil one, and in Rev 12:9 it describes how the devil deceives the world and leads it astray.

But then Jesus comes on the scene and 1 John 3:8 says that *“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”* So you can see how blessing people in Jesus name might lead to a bit of a confrontation in some circumstances.

Because there is something of the enemy going on in people’s lives and a Blessing in Jesus name is actually about destroying that work.

Now I’ve been talking about this in broad terms – so let’s get a bit more specific and look at a scriptural situation where this happened.

Our first scripture reading this morning was from Acts 4 where we read about Peter and John getting in trouble with the Jewish authorities for doing ministry in Jesus name.

And as we take a closer look at it I want to show you that Peter and John were doing was considered to be “a blessing”

Let’s turn back to the previous chapter where Peter is speaking to the crowd that had gathered around them after they healed the lame man who was begging at the temple gate and in 3:26 he says to the crowd *“When God raised up his servant [Jesus], he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”*

So while Peter and John initially administered an inoffensive blessing of healing in Jesus name – which met a very obvious and inoffensive need in this man’s life, we can see from what they say here that being a blessing is also about ministering to people to help them repent from things and turn away from things that may not be so innocuous or innocent – but are in fact “wicked ways” and need to be addressed – or blessed - even more so than being lame.

And that is what Peter and John are doing with the people in the crowd who have gathered around them, and they are doing this in Jesus name.

So, as I said sometimes this provokes a confrontation – and in this case it is the Priests and the Sadducees who react. They bring the temple guard over and have Peter and John arrested and detained overnight in jail not only because they are doing things in Jesus name, but specifically because they are proclaiming resurrection from the dead, in Jesus name.

Now if you are all read up on your 2nd Temple Judaism, you will know that the Sadducees were the dominant party within the Temple system – and they were very insistent that there was no future resurrection from the dead, for two reasons.

First, because there are only a few indicators in the Old Testament scriptures that some sort of bodily resurrection would take place in the future – and the Sadducees took a very pragmatic approach to interpreting the O.T. and which

made it easy to downplay and deny these few passages, and they did this for the second reason.

The Sadducees realized that teachings on resurrection from the dead – with rewards for those who had been faithful to Yahweh – were dangerous because they encouraged zealous young men to disregard their own lives and rebel against Rome in pursuit of faithful Judaism.

And the political existence of the Sadducees and the Temple administration was tied to their success in ensuring that adequate religious compromises could be made to keep the Romans satisfied that the Jews were loyal subjects of the empire – when in fact many were not.

So, this is why they have arrested Peter and John and are trying to figure out what to do with them. Their dilemma is described in 4:16 when they say *“Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. But [we must] stop this thing from spreading any further among the people...”*

And so as religious leaders they order Peter and John to cease and desist from preaching or teaching in the name of Jesus and they threaten them with further punishment – being whipped and flogged - if they continue to do so.

But brothers and sisters we must take note of Peter and John's response in vs. 19. Where Peter says *"Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to Him? You be the judges!"*

So, brothers and sisters – Peter and John know (through the help of the Holy Spirit) that what their leaders have asked them to do goes against what God has asked them to do through Jesus Christ and that the right thing to do in this situation is to listen to God instead of their leaders.

So – even though their efforts to bless others in the name of Jesus is resulting in an experience that is not much of a blessing to them – being arrested, locked up in jail overnight, being reprimanded by the authorities and threatened with physical punishment – Peter and John show no indications that they will stop their efforts to bless others in Jesus name.

Rather they will continue to carry on the task for which Jesus was sent *"to bless [people]... by turning [people] from their wicked ways."* (3:26)

Now brothers and sisters – we are faced with a similar situation these days.

While most of the time we are engaged in going out to bless people with inoffensive blessings – as we have been doing in the Blessing Project – the task that we have been given by our Lord as His Church is "to GO OUT and make disciples of all Nations" and that means that we are also to bless people by calling them to turn from their wicked ways.

And the way we do that most effectively brothers and sisters is through the official teachings and doctrines of the Church, derived from the scripture, and lived out in our own lives.

So that as people who are innocuously blessed in some inoffensive way begin to develop connections with us and with Jesus Christ the teachings and doctrines of the Church

are able to show them what they must turn away from, and our own lives illustrate the blessing which comes from doing that so that they are encouraged in this process - Do you see how that works?

And so, the church has official teaching and doctrines on a wide range of subjects – on work and doing business, recreation and education, on politics, and science, on handling money, on social issues and charity, on other religions and culture and racism, on parenting, discipline, on alcohol and drugs and on marriage and human sexuality.

In each of these areas brothers and sisters we are blessed as we follow Christ and turn from our wicked ways and follow God’s creational intentions instead – as they are revealed to us by the Word of God in Scripture and in Creation.

Now this is similar to what Peter and John faced in Acts 4 because some of our governing authorities have recently taken offense to the Church’s longstanding doctrine and scriptural teaching about marriage and human sexuality and

how that actually blesses us and are claiming that it harms people instead.

You may be aware that this past May the City of Calgary passed a by-law in an attempt to prohibit what they called “conversion therapy” so that it is now against the law to offer or engage in *“a practice, treatment, or service designed to change, repress, or discourage a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, or to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour.”* (

<http://box5288.temp.domains/~freetoca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Calgary-CT-Bylaw.pdf>)

Breaking this by-law carries a 10,000.00 fine and/or jail time.

And the Federal Liberals are also in the process of attempting to make practicing “conversion therapy” as described, a criminal offence which if convicted would carry a criminal record.

Now let’s not get distracted by the politics and the implications of this - its sufficient to understand that those who are drafting such legislation are only responding to what

they see as the popular sentiment of our day. They know this will win them in favor with voters and keep them in power.

It's no different from how the Sadducees thought, and why they had Peter and John arrested for teaching about the resurrection in Jesus name. Some things never change.

What's important for us is that we follow Peter and John's response to what these authorities are saying to us and threatening us with in this area where they have overstepped their authority. Brothers and sisters *"Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to these politicians, or to God? You be the judges!* Do we fear human beings or do we fear God?

We know that in circumstances like this the right thing to do is to listen to God, and to continue doing the work and ministry of Jesus Christ, were we bless people by calling them to turn from their wicked ways as Peter says in Act 3:26.

And We continue speaking the truth in love as Paul says in Eph 4:15 so that people are not confused about what it means to

follow Jesus, they are not blown here and there by false teachings, but instead they are enabled to grow to spiritual maturity in Jesus Christ.

But brothers and sisters – what do we make of the accusation that what God intends for blessing is actually harming those we wish to bless? After all two weeks ago we looked at Jeremiah 29:11 where God says *"I have plans to bless you and not to harm you."*

Well brothers and sisters since the goal is to bring about spiritual blessing and spiritual maturity in the lives of those who are being disciplined, we need to understand that these spiritual results can only come through spiritual methods – and thus the implied harm that most people assume is occurring in the term "conversion therapy" such as electro-therapy, or coercive behavioral modification techniques are not all what is involved in Christian discipleship and biblical repentance.

In fact anything that you hear about which promises to bring about such spiritual results apart from co-operation with the work of the Holy Spirit would fall into the category of *“the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming”* that Paul references in Eph 4:15.

So to help people avoid being harmed and taken advantage of by such schemes it is important that we continue to speak the truth in love about how the Holy Spirit works to help us bring our lives in line with God’s design in all areas of our lives – our sexuality included. And teach people how we are to cooperate with that.

And if we are working with the Holy Spirit then the fruit of the Holy Spirit will start to become evident as this process continues on in our lives – there will be “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23)

Now we must also take care to distinguish between harm and hurt. Much of what is purported to be harm is simply hurt and as the scripture says in Prov 27:6 *“the wounds of a friend are faithful”*

Paul himself writes to the Corinthian Christians on such a matter in 2 Cor 7:8-9 where he says *“I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.”*

As I’ve said before – the Christian faith is not about nice people being nice to other nice people – we are to speak the truth in love to each other -even if it hurts - so that we grow into maturity.

And in the end brothers and sisters, we are not able to speak into every accusation of harm – only God can do that - but what we can do is follow Peter and John’s example of how they would continue to conduct themselves in spite of the

reaction which their ministry of blessing received from the authorities. This is what they said... *“As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”* (Acts 4:20)

So, it’s time to start speaking up about what we have seen Christ do in the lives of people and how we have heard that this has blessed them. The trouble is that we don’t do much talking or sharing on this particular issue.

But that is changing – more and more people are coming forward these days to speak openly about what they have seen and heard and experienced in Jesus Christ.

So this morning I’ve invited someone to share their story with us – to give us a personal example of what this message is about this morning and why it is so important that we continue to bless people, even when people don’t feel blessed by it, even when they don’t appreciate it and even when they might accuse us of harming them...

We must continue to speak the truth in love – because sometime blessings come in disguise...

So, I’m going to turn it over to Mr. Emmanuel Sanchez now... and let him wrap it all up for us - by sharing his story, speaking about what he has seen and heard Jesus do in his life.

Emmanuel – over to you my friend.

Please copy and paste link to view a short video of Emmanuel’s story

<https://www.facebook.com/MPGenuis/videos/326073988692>

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