

## Sept 2 Blessings – Passages: Special Moments

Scripture: Luke 1:57-68 (birth of John the Baptist)

As we began this series we focused on how all of life, every moment can be a blessing or contains blessings within it. This focus on the concept that we are bathed in the blessings of God should not keep us from also acknowledging there are those once in a lifetime type moments that are truly life defining and give us or can give us special feelings of closeness to God. We sometimes call these moments, “Rites of Passage.” They come in many forms and are sacred points of entry into new and uncharted territory. Marriage, birth of a child or grandchild, retirement, moving, and more are such rites. These special, sometimes once-in-a-lifetime moments, when surrounded in words and acts of blessing, provide us with courage and assurance that we are not alone and that our next steps are anointed and held by God.

Crossroad times are scary. We know that the next step we take will have life altering consequences for us. This is a good time to pause, to celebrate how God has been with us until this moment, the blessings we have experienced, and from that should come the awareness that God will be blessing our future, no matter how uncertain. Sometimes it will be easy to lift up these threshold events as being a time of blessing. Other times, the journey to find blessings will be much more difficult.

I want you to think about those holy sacred moments, sometimes once in a lifetime moments, that launched you into new and uncharted territory. Name some you have experienced. Do you see how God was present? What crossroads are you likely facing now or in the near future? Have you been contemplating a move, are you struggling with medical issues, are you in the middle of a family crisis, or something else? Today we are being challenged to pause and surround these events with acts of blessing.

The scripture lesson for today helps us to see how this can be lived out. Zechariah and Elizabeth had been childless for many years. An angel had come to share the good news that they were to have a son, the one who would go before the Messiah. When Zechariah questions the angel’s words, as punishment, he cannot talk all during the pregnancy. When finally the promise is fulfilled and Zechariah can speak once more he begins, “Bless the Lord God of Israel because he has come to help.”

We need to pay attention to what he does. His first words are praise and blessing to God. Think about how different that is from how we often approach life. When something good, wondrous and perhaps almost miraculous occurs we often talk about how blessed we are. So often we hear, "God blessed me" because of the life changing event that happened. This turns blessings into something closer to having good luck which is so different than what we are being challenged to embrace. Zechariah, instead of looking at how fortunate he was, turned his focus towards God. The Irish have much more this view of life. We need to learn from them to pause at life-changing moments to give thanks and blessing to God.

Think about the poems that were shared. All of us, who have had pets, know the hole that is left in the fabric of our existence when they have died. The poem calls you to remember, to claim the sadness, but to even more claim the joy. You are to recall how they blessed you, how they will not be forgotten, and will always be woven into the fabric of your heart. In a challenging moment such as this, it is hard to feel blessed. But, when we give the pain to God and embrace the joy of memories we truly celebrate how life was good, was blessed by this beloved pet. And the other poem about moving celebrates the past and embraces the future. Again, embracing the memories and the joys but also looking forward.

Whenever we come to life changing moments, this should be our pattern. We need to look back and see what has happened to bring us to this point. Celebrate the blessings we have experienced in that journey. Then we need to see how God is fully present in this moment of change. Whatever we are feeling we can give it to God knowing God understands. If it is joy, God celebrates with us the anticipation for what it is to come. If we are at a crossroads because of pain or loss, God is present comforting us. And if we are at that moment filled with fear because the future is so uncertain, pausing to focus on God reminds us that we are not alone. This allows us to, with hope, take the next step on the journey. Yes it will be into the unknown, but in remembrance and joy we know we are not walking alone.

Also, by focusing on God we place our lives in the hands of God believing that God will direct our next steps. Think about some of those moments of unknown. Jenny and I often talk about when we were first married. We planned for it, we thought we were so mature and knew so much even though we were in our early 20's. We now laugh at how little we knew. Sound familiar? Even when the event is planned for, these life-changing events often launch us onto unknown paths. This is even more the case when the event is unplanned. A health crisis, for one, coming unexpectedly, causes all the carefully made plans that we have turn to dust. Focusing on God is asking God to guide our steps. It is also a reminder that we are not alone, that God is with us on the journey.

Too often we are either so wrapped up in the joy of the event that we forget to bless God as God is blessing us or we are so enmeshed in the tragic event that we forget to rely upon God. Seeing God in the unique moments of life grounds us and keeps us connected to God and to each other.

Today, I am going to take one event in my life and let you see how the celebration of the event, blessing God who has blessed us, gives us the ability and the joy to live into the future. I am hoping you can think of like experiences in your own life.

I still recall quite vividly the day our son packed up his stuff and moved out of the house to room with a friend while attending college. I do not know the reasons for this memory to remain so vivid. Perhaps it was because he was the first of our children to leave home. Maybe because he was the only boy and we had that father son bond that is so special. As he was packing, the enthusiasm for this next step in the journey of life was evident in his face, in his voice and in his being. He was ready for this new beginning. He drove away and soon thereafter Jenny went to work and the girls were at school. I sat alone in the house with the dogs at my feet. Now, being alone on a day off was not a new experience. But today, it felt different, more permanent. I was beginning to grasp a little bit what it was going to be like when all the children had left the house.

For a few moments I was awash in sadness for my loss. But then, I began to think about my son's life. As I recalled his growing years I began to smile. I knew he was ready for this next step in his life. I realized his mom and I had done everything we

could to get him ready for it and it was time to release him and bless him on his way. So, I gave thanks for his life, his love and then asked God to be with him and bless him as he embarked on that unknown path of adulthood. I also asked God to bless me as I realized today was the first step into a new journey of my own. (I didn't realize it then but it would be almost a decade before that nest became empty!)

Think about the momentous events of your life. As you view them can you see the blessings? Even in the darkest moments knowing God is with you and you were not walking that road alone is a blessing. Hold on to those feelings because some day another major event, either planned or unplanned will happen. Being able to bless God at that time will help you. Next week we will look at the routine events of life that remind us that there is a season and time for everything. But today, Bless God for all the major events you have experienced. They have helped to mold you into the person you are.