

[Note: Phrasing, grammar, and lay out reflect the primary use of this document for oral presentation.]

I HOPE YOU HAVE A BLESSED DAY ... HAVE A BLESSED DAY NOW, YOU HEAR...IT'S FAIRLY COMMON THESE DAYS TO BE SENT FORTH FROM THE JIFFY MART WITH THIS PARTING EXHORTATION. IT IS THE EVANGELICAL ANSWER TO HAVE A NICE DAY, I GUESS. AS WE HAVE MORFED INTO THIS - EVERYONE IS SPIRITUAL AND ALMOST NO ONE IS RELIGIOUS - COUNTRY OF OURS OUR WAY OF SAYING GOOD BYE HAS TAKEN ON THIS THEOLOGICAL OVERLAY.

IT IS NOT THE FIRST TIME OUR WAY OF PARTING HAS HAD THEOLOGICAL OVERTONES. MOST OF US I GUESS REALIZE THAT GOOD BYE IS A DESCENDANT OF GOD BE YE. MY OLDER BROTHER DOESN'T CARE MUCH FOR THE NEW GREETING OF HAVE A BLESSED DAY. HE LEAVES STORES SOMETIMES MUMBLING THAT HE'LL HAVE ANY KIND OF DAY HE CHOOSES. ALTHOUGH HE CHOOSES, APPARENTLY, FOR A GOOD NUMBER OF THEM TO BE BLESSED.

I THINK I KNOW WHAT MOST PEOPLE MEAN WHEN THEY WISH EACH OTHER A BLESSED DAY. I SUSPECT IT IS ACTUALLY FAIRLY CLOSE TO WHAT MY BROTHER WANTS. THEY ARE WISHING YOU A DAY THAT GOES YOUR WAY ....A DAY WHEN GOOD AS YOU DEFINE IT TRIUMPHS OVER EVIL ... A DAY IN WHICH GOD'S FAVOR IS CLEARLY WITH YOU. MY WIFE SAYS I MAY BE OVER THINKING THIS JUST A BIT. SHE REMINDS ME THAT BETTY WHITE HAS HER OWN TAKE ON ALL THIS WISHING THAT PEOPLE HAVE THE DAY THEY DESERVE AND THAT KARMA SORT IT ALL OUT. I FOUND MYSELF WONDERING ABOUT ALL OF THIS AS I PONDERED THESE LESSONS. I FOUND MYSELF WONDERING WHETHER OR NOT IT COULD BE SAID THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST HAD A BLESSED DAY IN THE GOSPEL THIS MORNING. I THINK THE ANSWER IS PROBABLY NO ...UNLESS WE DEEPEN OUR THINKING A BIT ABOUT JUST WHAT THAT PHRASE MIGHT MEAN WHEN THE VENEER OF HAVE A NICE DAY IS STRIPPED AWAY. AS LONG AS I HAVE BEEN ORDAINED – AND THAT'S A WHILE NOW – I HAVE WONDERED WHAT I MEAN WHEN I PRONOUNCE A BLESSING AT THE END OF EACH SERVICE. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WISH UPON A GROUP OF PEOPLE THE BLESSING OF GOD? WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT .... IT IS REALLY JUST THE EPISCOPAL WAY OF SAYING ... Y'ALL HAVE A BLESSED DAY NOW, YA HEAR.

WHAT WE KNOW IS THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST HAD BECOME AN IRRITANT TO KING HEROD. HE COULD NOT HAVE REALLY THREATENED THE HOLD THE KING

HAD ON POWER BUT I SUSPECT HE PRICKED THE KING'S OWN SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG. PRICKED IT OFTEN ENOUGH AND DEEP ENOUGH THAT THE KING – NOT GIVEN TO OR NOT ABLE TO MEANINGFULLY REPENT – THE KING HAD HIM ARRESTED. I REALIZE THAT WHAT THE KING DOES NEXT SUGGESTS HE HAD VERY LITTLE SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG BUT IT IS NOT SO MUCH THE KING BUT HIS DAUGHTER WHO CASTS ALL THOUGHT OF RIGHT AND WRONG ASIDE. FOR HIS PART IN THIS DARK AFFAIR THE KING HONORS HIS PROMISE AND EXECUTES JOHN TO SATISFY THE REQUEST OF HIS DAUGHTER. EVEN THOUGH IT WOULD HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO CONTINUE THEIR CONVERSATION.

THIS STORY AT FIRST GLANCE STANDS IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE SECOND READING THIS MORNING. IN THE APOSTLE PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS WE HEAR HIS SPIRIT SOAR AS HE REMINDS THEM OF THEIR PLACE AND STATUS WITH THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE. WE ARE ADOPTED AS CHILDREN OF GOD ... CHOSEN FROM THE BEGINNING TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE AND BLESSING WHICH IS FREELY BESTOWED UPON US WITHOUT REGARD TO BETTY WHITE'S KARMA. PAUL SEES US AS CAUGHT IN GOD'S GRAND DESIGN TO GATHER ALL THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH. HE REMINDS US THAT WE ARE ALL SEALED IN BAPTISM AS CHRIST'S OWN FOREVER.

THIS IS AN IMAGE OF OURSELVES THAT WE TOO EASILY FORGET OR LOSE IN THE MIDST OF OUR BUSIEST DAYS. WE MAY FORGET WHEN LEAVING THE JIFFY MART THAT WE ARE FELLOW HEIRS WITH CHRIST AND THAT WE ARE AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST IN THIS WORLD. WE MAY FORGET THAT WE ARE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN ONE SPIRITUAL FAMILY ... ALL RELATED TO ONE ANOTHER THROUGH OUR ADOPTION INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD.

IT IS EASY TO MISLAY THAT IDENTITY AMONGST THE MANY THAT THE WORLD SEEKS TO IMPOSE UPON US. RATHER THAN FELLOW HEIR WITH CHRIST THE WORLD WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE WE ARE ONLY CONSUMERS ... HERE TO BUY AND SELL ... MOSTLY BUYING. RATHER THAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN A SPIRITUAL FAMILY THE WORLD WOULD HAVE US KNOW OURSELVES ONLY AS COMPETITORS FOR LIMITED RESOURCES AND RATIONED LOVE. THE WORLD WOULD HAVE US CONSTANTLY CAUGHT IN A COMPETITIVE BATTLE TO WIN THE DAY AND SEIZE THE PRIZE. THE WORLD WOULD RATHER WE NOT SEE OURSELVES AS HAVING OBTAINED AN INHERITANCE IN CHRIST BUT RATHER THAT WE DEFINE OURSELVES AND OUR WORTH BY THE LEVEL OF OUR INCOME AND THE LENGTH OF OUR TITLES. MAYBE EVEN JUST BY THE KIND OF CAR WE DRIVE OR THE CLOTHES WE WEAR. FORGET THAT YOU ARE SEALED BY THE

HOLY SPIRIT ... THE WORLD DECIDES YOU ARE OR ARE NOT SOMETHING SIMPLY BY THE COLOR OF YOUR SKIN.

ALL OF THIS, OF COURSE, HAS MUCH TO DO WITH THAT FIRST QUESTION I RAISED. IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH HOW WE DISCERN A BLESSED DAY FROM ONE THAT IS NOT SO BLESSED. WHETHER THE DAY IS BLESSED OR NOT HAS – IT TURNS OUT – LITTLE TO DO WITH THE EVENTS OF THE DAY AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THE INNER DISPOSITION OF THE PERSON WHO MOVES THROUGH THAT DAY. I AM REMINDED OF AN INSIGHT FROM DE CHARDIN ... THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST AND SCIENTIST WHOSE EARLY ATTEMPTS TO SEE FAITH THROUGH THE EYES OF A SCIENTIST ARE ONLY NOW GAINING AN EAR IN THE CHURCH ... DE CHARDIN OBSERVED: “SURELY WE ARE NOT PHYSICAL BEINGS HAVING A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE BUT RATHER WE ARE SPIRITUAL BEINGS HAVING A PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE.” ON THIS INSIGHT TURNS OUR DISCERNMENT OF EACH DAY AS BLESSED OR NOT - REGARDLESS OF THE PATH WE TAKE. WHETHER WE HAVE IN EACH DAY CULTIVATED OUR RECOLLECTION OF OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST OR INSTEAD SURRENDERED OURSELVES TO THE ROLE AND DEFINITION THAT THE WORLD WOULD PLACE UPON US ...HEREIN LIES THE DETERMINATION OF A DAY AS BLESSED OR NOT.

ONE OF THE REASONS WE COME TO THIS PLACE IS TO RE-MEMBER ...TO RE-CONNECT OURSELVES IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. TO RE-MEMBER THAT WE ARE NOT WHAT THE WORLD SAYS BUT WHAT GOD SAYS NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. TO THE EXTENT THAT WE ENGAGE IN REGULAR STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES ... TO THE EXTENT THAT WE SPEND TIME EACH DAY REFLECTING UPON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD ... TO THE EXTENT THAT WE SPEND SOMETIME EACH DAY IN PRAYER NO MATTER THE SPECIFIC FORM IT TAKES ... IN ALL THIS WE ARE OPENING OURSELVES TO AN AWARENESS ...WE ARE BUILDING WITHIN OURSELVES AN AWARENESS THAT RENDERS EVEN THE MOST DIFFICULT DAY BLESSED .... BLESSED BY OUR SENSE THAT WE ARE INDEED CHRIST’S OWN FOREVER .... THAT AS PAUL KNEW ... NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD ...THAT OUR PERSONAL HORIZON EXTENDS BEYOND OUR DEATH ... THAT WE ARE NOT AS THE WORLD WOULD DEFINE BUT WE ARE CHRIST’S OWN FOREVER.

AND FOR THIS REASON AND NO OTHER IS A DAY BLESSED. I THINK IT WAS THE ENGLISH AUTHOR CHESTERTON WHO EXPRESSED HIS AMAZEMENT AND GRATITUDE THAT HE FOUND HIMSELF THE RECIPIENT OF MORE THAN JUST ONE DAY, INDEED, WITH THE CHANCE THAT THEY ARE ALL BLESSED!

SO ... Y’ALL HAVE A BLESSED DAY NOW, YA HEAR.