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SERMON TITLE: **The Mystery of God: We were Made for Faith**
Advent Three
SCRIPTURE: **1 Corinthians 1:30b, 2:6-10**
DATE: **December 13, 2020**
View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Isaiah 25:6-9

What do you love in your life? What brings you great delight?

*A special possession?
A certain family tradition?
Going out in nature?
The night sky?
A particular restaurant, movie, holiday, or celebration?
Your mother's pie?*

What do you relish? If you haven't put your finger on something, do so this week. Walk through your week looking for what you enjoy, you love, what blesses you.

I am realizing what I love. I love decorating, putting up the tree, seeing Christmas lights, arranging a Dickens Village. I used to think of all the work it was—but this year it is popping out in my world how important it is. I love making a home.

How have you been blessed this week?

Last Sunday I went out in my front yard to rake leaves. I had finished one bag, and then stopped to take my granddaughter home. As we turned the corner, we noticed that my neighbor two doors down was raking my leaves! When I returned, all the leaves in my yard were raked and bagged.

What a blessing!

Blessings are sometimes hidden. You can miss them if you are too busy. These kindnesses often go unnoticed. Don't think of them as random at all—they may be spur-of-the-moment acts, but they are *intentional blessings of life*. As I write this, I get a text that another neighbor who has a lawn service business just fixed my broken gate for no charge. How grateful I am.

God created us for blessing. The world was "good;" humanity was good, God said. That's because God created us in his image. God was delighted to provide the Garden of Eden and walk there with God's people every day. God wants to bless us.

Having a relationship with God is a blessing.

You can see throughout Scripture this thread of goodness and blessing. Isaiah talked about it—you heard it: "the Lord will spread a wonderful feast; delicious banquet with well-aged wine and choice meat." It will be a celebration when God will remove the gloom that hangs over the earth, the gloom of death. But that's not all. He will wipe away your tears and remove the sting of insults and mockery against all believers. (Is 25:6-9) Blessings.

God created us with blessing in mind.

As you think about *all the good things in your life*, the things that you love, let's read today's Scripture. First is 1 Corinthians 1:30b: "[Jesus] became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

Jesus is a blessing. He is the wisdom we do not have. He made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin, which we cannot do on our own.

We don't necessarily understand all that he is and does. It is a mystery. It is like a child who does not understand the home they live in, the room provided for them, or the cost of the sustenance which they receive. Thus, we do not necessarily see that Jesus' wisdom makes a difference in our lives. We do not see what it means to enjoy the holiness he gives, and what the freedom from sin does for us.

For instance, you might make better choices because of the wholesome influence of your faith or the example of your Christian friends and stories from the Bible. Now let's read on. Paul writes: READ 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

What Paul is saying is that much of the world cannot see the purposes of Jesus; that Jesus came for our ultimate glory. Jesus came to bless us and to add blessing to our lives through faith.

It was expressed in the Old Testament like this: "*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.*" That is a good thing, and not to be ignored, or you will end up being one of those people who crucified the Lord of heaven, missing the blessing.

You crucify him in your heart and mind by pushing him away; ignoring his commands and not giving him access to your heart.

Once in the book of Joel, which was probably written around 800 B.C., Israel was being attacked by swarms of locusts, billions of them. You may have never seen this, but one summer in West, Texas, there was a locust attack and we saw piles of dead locusts on the sidewalks and streets. Joel wrote that the locusts were destroying everything. Things were bad. There was no food, businesses were being forced to close and were going bankrupt, animals were dying. Worship services were closed. Joel got a message from the Lord. God said, "Fast and pray but do not rend (tear) your clothes. Instead rend your heart. If you do that, **God will turn this curse into a blessing.** (See Joel 2:12-14)

Do you have a big problem? Do you need God's favor? Open your heart to God. Are we as a nation opening our heart to God concerning the pandemic? Or do we rely on our own wisdom or the wisdom of the world?

These are questions we must ask ourselves because turning to God, as mysterious as it seems, is quite a worthy solution. Joel reveals that when our hearts are set on God, then God turns a curse into a blessing.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."

It has been this way since the beginning because **we were made for faith.**

But we tend to struggle with faith. Remember Zechariah, the priest? He and Elizabeth wanted a baby but when an angel announced they would have one; when the angel said, "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, Zechariah didn't believe him, and received the nine-month curse of muteness.

But, God did bring the blessing. God is good (in spite of our failures) . . . ☺

Many people miss the blessing. It is an observable fact. The English writer, Charles Dickens, famously observed this and wrote about it in his play, "A Christmas Carol." Isn't it amazing that a Christmas Carol would be about a bitter, rich old man who missed all the blessings in life! Ebenezer Scrooge is defined as "a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, . . . secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster."¹

Scrooge was a joyless man, even though his name, Ebenezer, meant "help-stone." The Hebrew word "Eben-ezer," רֶזַע־אֶזֶר means stone-helper. Samuel used a stone to mark a place where the Lord had given his people victory. רֶזַע־אֶזֶר ("Ezer") is a name for God which means "helper." God is our helper.

So Scrooge is a dichotomy. His last name reflects his heartless stinginess. His first name indicates solid rock helper.

Dickens tells us Scrooge was thought of as "evil and dark." His nephew, however, loved Christmas and believed it had done him good and would continue to do him good. Christmas was a time that "men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely." Therefore he said, "God bless Christmas!"²

But this did not affect Ebenezer Scrooge one bit. He was as hateful as ever. But he would not be left in that state. Three Spirits were sent to visit him.

The first Spirit showed him his past, his beloved sister; his first boss, whom he realized had the power to "make our job light or burdensome by simple things." It made Scrooge want to say a good word to his own clerk. He saw the girlfriend he had rejected and the family he could have had, the husband he could have been, and the children he could have provided for sitting by his own fireplace in warmth and delight. But he had failed to open his heart to that blessing.

The second vision was of the present—his clerk Bob Cratchit and family, including Tiny Tim, who was seriously ill. They were neither handsome nor rich nor well-dressed but their home was filled with joy. The whole town was filled with Christmas joy, whether rich or struggling, in jail or hospital, miners in a cottage, sailors on the sea—all sang carols and spoke kind words, patient in the greater hope. Then, Scrooge overheard his nephew's family toasting him—*he's rich, they said, but his wealth is of no use to him, for he doesn't do any good with it.*

The final vision was of Scrooge's future death where not one person mourned. He asked to see just one family who had any emotion over his death, but it was revealed to be a couple who owed him money. He saw Bob Cratchit and his family mourning the death of Tiny Tim. Scrooge saw his own neglected grave. Sobbing, he wondered if he was past all hope. He wakes up on Christmas morning pledging to honor Christmas in his heart, the past, the present, and the future, and not to shut out any of these Spirit-led lessons.

As he gave his gifts and walked the street that Christmas day, blessings abounded and he received them all.

How are you accepting your blessings? How are you at extending them? We were made for faith, and through the Spirit's power, we too can change. Would you like to be blessed this Christmas? Do not shut out this lesson!

AMEN

¹ Charles Dickens, *Five Christmas Novels* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1939), 18.

² *Ibid.* 20, 62-67.