

Greetings church,

In talking about being blessed or giving a blessing, Henri first has the task of defining his terms. He draws his definition of the word “blessed” from “blessing” and he draws his definition of that word from Latin. The Latin word from which the word blessing comes is *benedicere* or “benediction”. We are all well familiar with the word benediction but let’s break it into its constituent parts. *Dictio* means speaking and *bene* means well so, speaking well “or saying good things of someone”¹. Not only do we all need to hear good things spoken of us, but we all long to hear good things spoken of us. We all, both need and long, to hear you are loved; you are valued; you are accepted; with you I am well pleased. “To give a blessing is to affirm, to say ‘yes’ to a person’s Belovedness ... To give a blessing creates the reality of which it speaks.”² We know, and maybe some of us have experienced, the reality of this statement. With our words we can create good or evil. Tell a kid he’s a degenerate waste of space enough times and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; he ends up spending his life in prison. Tell a girl she’s beautiful enough times and she’ll have the confidence to believe so no matter what the world’s false standards might try to tell her. Jesus himself heard a blessing, was spoken well of, at his baptism; “this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!” If Jesus needed to hear such a blessing, it stands to reason that to hear such a blessing is a need for the rest of us as well.

Henri points out the truth that hearing a blessing like this is not just a one time thing either. Precisely because of all the negative we hear, and that we create for ourselves in our own heads, we need to be reaffirmed of our true self over and over again. He reveals why he has structured and ordered his thinking the way he has. “It is not enough to be chosen. We also need an ongoing blessing that allows us to hear in an ever-new way that we belong to a loving God who will never leave us alone, but will remind us always that we are guided by love on every step of our lives.”³ Faith, and affirmation, is not a one time transaction. It’s not, I’ve received Jesus, deposited him into my heart, and now I’m good to go! Faith, and affirmation, is daily exercise. Our faith and affirmation muscles grow slowly but surely over time as we continue to work them, strengthen them, nourish them and use them. To this point Henri gives the reader, us, two suggestions for claiming our blessedness.

First, he wants us to pray. And, thankfully, he clarifies. He’s not talking about talking-at-God prayer. Henri is talking about something far different and so difficult for the majority of us. Prayer that involved listening first and foremost. “... the real ‘work’ of prayer is to become silent and listen to the voice that says good things about me. This might sound self-indulgent, but, in practice, it is a hard discipline.”⁴ And if you’ve ever tried, you know this to be true! The negative voices are far louder and so much easier to hear. Henri knows it too. “To gently push aside and silence the many voices that question my goodness and to trust that I will hear a voice of blessing - that demands real effort.”⁵ How I wish he was wrong, but he is so right! Henri wants us to come to hear a new and different voice than the one that cuts down and diminishes and speaks evil. But he also does not want us to be deceived. “I do not want to suggest to you that one day you will hear that voice with your bodily ears. I am not speaking about a hallucinatory voice, but about a voice that can be heard

¹ Nouwen, Henri J.M. Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World. The Crossroad Publishing Company; New York, NY: 1992. p.68

² *ibid*, p.69

³ *ibid*, p.72

⁴ *ibid*, pp.75-76

⁵ *ibid*, p.76

by the ear of faith, the ear of the inner heart.”⁶ This is what true prayer life is and sounds like, which is why it is so hard for so many to pray. The true prayer life has far more to do with listening for the Voice of Truth than it does with talking at someone you hope is listening and will give you your heart's desire if you're a good boy or girl. That's Santa Claus, not God. The authentic prayer life listens for the truth of our blessedness far more than it asks God to be blessed.

Second, to claim our blessedness, Henri wants us to cultivate the practice, or discipline, of presence. By this he may mean cultivating the practice of awareness. There are a myriad of *little* ways in which you are blessed, in which your status as a beloved child of God is recognized, every single day. But most often, those blessings go completely overlooked. We are distracted. We are looking for big blessings, not little ones. We are listening to the voices of pain and suffering; criticism and rejection. All of these disrupt our awareness of the myriad of little blessings. “It has become extremely difficult for us to stop, listen, pay attention, and receive gratefully what is offered to us.”⁷ Henri wants us to be present to, to become aware of, these myriad blessings everyday. He gives us one final encouragement before he concludes his comments. “... claiming your own blessedness always leads to a deep desire to bless others. The characteristic of the blessed ones is that, wherever they go, they always speak words of blessing.”⁸ Perhaps more than ever our country is in a place where we need blessings to drown out all the negativity; the judgment; the wrath; the rhetoric that tells people they are *not* beloved, they are *not* blessed, but a burden and a danger. Let us be people who recognize our own blessedness such that we might bless others. Amen.

In Christ's Service,
Pastor Eddie

⁶ Nouwen, Henri J.M. Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World. The Crossroad Publishing Company; New York, NY: 1992. p.77

⁷ *ibid*, pp.79-80

⁸ *ibid*, p.82