

Sermon, February 13, 2022
Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 6:17-26;
“A Fresh Vision: A New Opportunity”
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In 1946, Richard James, a naval mechanical engineer, had a problem. He was working on a way to make better compressed springs that would support and stabilize sensitive instruments aboard a ship during rough seas. An invention like that, especially if he could patent it, could set him for life, or so he hoped. The problem was that he simply couldn't come up with a design that would work. Day in and day out, all he could see was his problem.

Then one day he accidentally knocked one of the springs off of the counter it fell and landed upright. He became a bit obsessed with the idea if he could get the right material for the coil spring, he might actually

be able to make the coil walk perhaps even down stairs. His wife looked in the dictionary and found a word that meant sleek and graceful. Slinky. And so, one of the historic toys of the 50's well onto the 70's.

James never solved the coil problem to stabilize the ship. He was frustrated and angry, he could have stayed focused on his problem. Instead, he saw something come out of his problem that took him and his life in a completely different direction. I'm sure he was glad he did. The original slinky sold 100 million, adjusted for inflation over its first five years, that comes out to 6 billion dollars today. Very often, our problems can lead to wonderful opportunities, but only if we choose to see them. For every James, there are hundreds of people focused only on their problems, living in frustration.

Anna had a similar problem. Not working on stabilizing a ship, but still a problem. A mundane problem. It was common for people in her neighborhood in that era to give the mailman some little token of appreciation at Christmas. Now, Anna was 76 on a fixed income and didn't have money to throw away, and she probably wouldn't have thrown money around even if she had it. She thought about baking, but the idea of slaving over one more baked good at Christmas over a hot stove didn't thrill her. She could knit something she supposed, but that took time and knitted things wore out. She always wondered if that was worth the time and effort it took.

So instead, she decided to paint him a picture. She loved to paint, but she had arthritis. But a painting would last. And so she painted a picture. When her right hand got tired she switched to her left. Not only did he love it, but others did, as well, so she, at the age of 76, began a new career. She would paint over 1,500 canvases in almost thirty years.

Her paintings would be sold anywhere from \$8,000 to \$10,000 dollars, quite a jump from selling them for a 3 to 5 dollar commission. Her fame grew, and at 88, *Mademoiselle Magazine* named her Young Woman of the Year. Anna Robertson Moses, affectingly known because of her late start in an art career, became known affectionately as Grandma Moses. All because she couldn't quite figure out what to get the mailman for Christmas.

Isn't it amazing what can happen when we stop looking at our problems as problems, getting frustrated, and begin to see them as something else? An opportunity. As we look at many of the stories of people who have done amazing and other unexpected things, often the difference between them and others is not so much a matter of talent, although that's undeniably there. But in their ability to see their problems not as annoyances, not as frustrations, anxiety, and fear, but as opportunities.

How do you look at your problems? This morning, we are on our second in a series of messages called Fresh Vision. We are going to spend time in this series exploring what it means to have fresh vision, to see our lives in a different way. There is a passage of Scripture in Jeremiah that says *a people without a vision*

will perish. I love that verse. I love it because I need a reminder of how crucial a vision is. It's disheartening how many people will go through life without a vision. Without a sense of joy, purpose, or that God has a plan or is even invested in their lives. A people without a vision will perish.

And so, as I said, over the next few weeks, we will look hopefully with fresh eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, to capture or recapture that vision God has for us. So what might happen is we begin to have a fresh vision, a new way to see our own problems, frustrations in life?

Well, let's go back to our Gospel lesson where Luke gives his account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus gives what we call the beatitudes, the blessings. But I've noticed that if you only take the first part of the beatitudes, they don't make any sense. Have you never noticed that? They really don't. If you only look at the first part of the beatitudes, they are a bit nonsensical. Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are hated, excluded, reviled, defamed. What? No, they aren't. Those are horrible things to have happen to a person. How in the world can Jesus say they are blessed?

Because the problem isn't the blessing. The blessing is this, every problem we have in life is always an opportunity for God to bless us, meet our needs, or move us into a new direction in life we never would have went if God had not allowed us to experience that problem in life. The problem isn't the blessing, the blessing is that every problem is an opportunity for us to see God working in our lives.

The hungry aren't blessed because they are hungry, but because God meets our needs. The poor aren't blessed because they are poor, but because they will experience the richness of heaven that far exceeds temporary finances. You aren't blessed because you weep, but because God will fill your life with laughter, You aren't blessed because you are persecuted for your faith, but because you have a opportunity to live in a way that proves the reality of Jesus.

Luke does something very interesting with this account, for he shares an ending that Matthew doesn't. Here, Jesus speaks of those who don't have any of these problems. They aren't suffering, aren't hungry, they aren't poor. People speak well of them, and Jesus says *Blessed are the people who experience woe.* Again, that almost doesn't make sense because it instinctively seems pretty good.

But I hope we can see Jesus point. We often pray that we don't have adversity in life. We don't want struggle, we don't want problems, we don't want people or experiences to be a roadblock in our lives. We want life to be pretty easy and simple. When we pray, we often pray for the life we see at the end of this passage. Or we might even ask God why can't my life be like that? Perhaps, though, one of the reasons life isn't like that is because if we never have adversity, we will never be aware of God's blessings. If we never have problems, we never have the grand experience of seeing God actively provide for our needs. If I never weep, I take laughter for granted. If I am never hungry or concerned about how I'm going to fulfill a

need, I never get to see the miracle of God coming through for me time after time after time. We would grow weak. We would assume that we don't need God, we would stop seeing Him. We would lose our vision. In our Scripture we read from Jeremiah, he says *a people who don't see God working through their lives tend to lose their roots and become dry.*

God doesn't promise that when we follow Him, when we really allow Jesus to become the Lord of our lives, that our problems, frustrations, anxiety, that it just all goes away. And maybe that's a good thing. Because what He does promise is to never leave us. And He promises that with every problem, we can see an opportunity for God to bless us. As you enter into this week with all sorts of problems you may not even be able to anticipate, will you be looking for the blessing of God? Amen.