

## **"The Pledge of Our Inheritance"**

Ephesians 1:3-14

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The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Prayer.

Over this summer,

I will take the occasion to preach from our Epistle lection,

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians,

Covering 75 of the 155 verses,

Providing us with a good foundation

For this important letter's further study.

This letter to the church in Ephesus is traditionally understood

As being authored by the apostle Paul

Sometime around 62 AD during his imprisonment in Rome.

Using established methods of academic analysis

Scholars today suggest that it was probably authored between 70 AD and 170 AD

Perhaps by a member of the community of faith in Ephesus

Possibly from an earlier manuscript from Paul.

One theory is that Ignatius of Antioch

A student of John, chosen by Peter himself to the episcopacy,

Martyred in the Coliseum and entombed in St. Peter's,

Who was very well versed in the text

And mirrors many of his own thoughts,  
Could have been the one who brought Ephesians all together into one cohesive document as we know it today.  
For the sake of tradition, and with a desire for simplicity,  
Allow me the freedom to refer to the author of Ephesians simply as the apostle Paul.

So, what do we have today?  
Our lesson is a compacted opening doxology  
With deeply tangled and interwoven statements  
Focusing on God, Christ, and Spirit  
- who God the Father is  
- what Jesus Christ his Son has done  
- why we have been marked by the Holy Spirit  
Admittedly, even for me,  
That is a lot of prairie to be covered in a fifteen-minute sermon.  
But here goes!

The first observation<sup>1</sup> to be made  
Is that ***our God has chosen us to be his believers.***  
Notice the text does not say we chose God,  
Rather "he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world  
To be holy and blameless before him in love."  
This might be wholly foreign to us  
Because we Americans like our freedom.  
Theological freedom of choice  
Is a concept that will get few arguments in American seminaries.  
We like the freedom to chose  
If we follow God, or Mohammad, or Buddha, or whomever.  
We've come to believe that religion is a right,  
A take it or leave it type of smorgasbord.  
But the apostle Paul is telling us otherwise.  
It was God who did the choosing,  
Wholly and completely independent of our input.  
It is written in the past tense,  
Something God has already done  
Even before the world was created.  
God chose us;  
This is why we believe in infant baptism.  
God chose us;

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<sup>1</sup> Credit for this outline goes to Arland J. Hultgren, Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN. His excellent commentary can be found at:  
[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\\_date=7/12/2009#](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=7/12/2009#)

This is why we believe there is nothing that can separate us from his love.  
God chose us;  
This is why we believe God jumps through hoops to send us his Son,  
Give his life as a sacrifice for us,  
To forgive us and to save us.  
The fact that God has gone to the effort to chose you to be his believer  
Makes efforts at unbelief incredibly futile.  
You can't run away.  
You can't hide.  
There is nothing you can say, think, or do  
That will undo that that which God has already done:  
That is, to make a believer out of you.  
The bulleted list of anecdotes are extensively filled  
With those who resist, and resist, and resist,  
Who finally submit and return with the realization that  
Ultimately it is wasted effort to resist God.  
The list of people who turn their back on God  
And never return to the fold is probably even longer.  
But the last laugh  
Is always the Lord's.  
For in life, we've been chosen by God to be his believers.  
And in death, we've been chosen to be saved by his grace into eternal life.

Secondly, I would observe from our epistle lesson this morning  
Is that ***we are destined to be adopted as God's children.***  
We've been chosen to be God's believer;  
Now we've been adopted as God's child.  
Adoption is a responsibility-loaded term.  
Responsibility rests wholly with the parent,  
In our case, with God.  
The parent is charged with loving their child,  
Caring for their child's every need,  
- food, water, shelter, clothing -  
Teaching their child the values and beliefs the parent holds fast as being honest and  
true.  
The parent is legally obligated to protect their children from harm  
And is required to take responsibility for their child's action.  
The kid breaks the neighbors window;  
The parent has to have it repaired.  
Adoption places one into an equal relationship with all the other siblings  
And it means that each lays claim to the inheritance of the parent.  
Now, make the transformation with me  
Regarding what this means for you in your life.  
God loves you.

God provides for your every need.  
God teaches you his laws, his will, his ways.  
God protects you from harm and takes responsibility for your actions.  
God treats you equally as every other believer, each of us equally as sisters and brothers.  
And you have been written into God will;  
His plan for eternity.  
We've been adopted  
And pledged an inheritance,  
- pledged, or given a "down payment"  
(the same Greek word, *arrabon*, can mean either)  
for the final and ultimate redemption that is to follow;  
That, in our living,  
We praise his glory.

Finally, I would suggest that the apostle Paul  
Wants the community of faith to know  
That ***God's motive may be love,***  
***But his means is grace.***

*That grace coming from being chosen as a believer before the beginning of the world?*

Wesley would call that prevenient grace;  
This concept of grace preceding human decision  
Enables one to accept the gift of salvation.  
God's gift of grace to you came before you could accept it;  
Like it or not,  
You own it.  
It's yours.

*That grace that comes from Jesus substituting himself for our sins,  
Allowing himself to be sacrificed on the cross,  
That we may have "redemption through his blood,  
The forgiveness of our trespasses"?*

Wesley would call that justifying grace.  
God pardons the believer's sin.  
We are received by God in spite of our sin.  
And God cancels our guilt  
And empowers us to repent and resist future sin,  
To fully love God and neighbor.

*That grace that sustains us for the journey,  
The gift to us of knowing "the mystery of his will, ...  
His plan for the fullness of time"?*

Wesley would call that sanctifying grace.  
The grace of God doesn't just claim us and convert us,  
It sustains us in our journey towards Christian perfection,

Enabling us to respond to God by leading  
Christ like and Spirit filled lives,  
Rooted in love.  
Indeed! Our forefather, John Wesley,  
Articulates our United Methodist doctrine  
Right out of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Dearly beloved,  
Consider this day,  
During this hour of sacred worship  
The fact that  
God has chosen you to be his believer,  
God has claimed you as his own child,  
And that God has given you every necessary gift of grace  
To one day,  
Bring you home.  
Knowing this,  
May everything we think, say, and do  
Be for the praise of his glory.  
Amen.