

July 11, 2021
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Ephesians 1:3-14

IN CHRIST.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the St Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the 1st chapter, that you heard read earlier.

I'm going to begin with a question. How many people here this morning made a decision to be born? Before you were conceived in your mother's womb, how many of you, by some weird form of telepathy, communicated to your mom and dad that you desired to enter this world and would they please take the appropriate actions necessary for your arrival? That's what I thought. And just as sure as you did not choose to be born – you did not choose to follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Jesus says:

"16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide..." (John 15:16)

St Paul wrote his letter to the Christian Church in Ephesus from prison. Scholars disagree exactly **where** he was imprisoned **when** he wrote the letter: was it a dark and damp prison cell in this or that city or was he merely under house arrest? Within the letter he speaks of suffering. He calls himself an ambassador in chains. (cf: Ephesians 3:13; 6:20) Due to the virus, many of you felt as if you were in chains. Some spent over a year under house arrest and I'm sure they would agree: some days, house arrest might as well be a dark damp prison cell because it's cold and lonely. It's difficult to keep your thoughts positive. It's hard to hope for the future. But as Paul wrote, he wasn't focused on his **earthly** situation in prison, but on **spiritual** blessings in heaven.

In the original language, the twelve verses of our text is actually just one really long sentence. (cf: Ephesians, Concordia Commentary, Winger, 210) It's as if Paul wants to overwhelm us by reminding us of all that God has done and accomplished for us **in Christ** Jesus. He writes:

"3 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." (Ephesians 1:3)

God has blessed you **in Christ**. It's not **in** you. It's all **in Christ**. In you is sin, death, and damnation. It's woven into the very fabric of your being because of inherited sin from Adam. You and I are in the same boat as St Paul when he writes:

"18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh." (Romans 7:18)

Even though nothing good dwells within Paul or you or me – we are blessed *in Christ*. Being *in Christ* is important. Go through our text and count how many times Paul writes “*in Christ*” or in “*in Him*.” There’s maybe ten. Being *in Christ* is important because *in Him* you have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. *In Christ*... by means of His work of salvation, His suffering, death, and resurrection, *you* are blessed. *In Christ*... that is, the fact that you were united to Christ in Baptism and adopted by God into the family of His Holy Christian Church, you have been granted His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. (cf: Romans 6:2-11)

In your life, when you make a decision, you choose what you believe to be the best. When you chose a community to live in, a home, a career, or a spouse, you likely sought out what was special and perhaps, as close to perfect as you could find. But not God. Nothing good dwells within your flesh and mine. There is only sin and imperfection, yet God chose you *in Christ*. He chose you for salvation before He laid the foundation of the world. (cf: Ephesians 1:4) It was eternally in the past... even before God created Adam and Eve and the fishes in the deep blue sea... He chose you that you would be holy and blameless before him. (cf: Ephesians 1:4)

Our God is a holy God. The sinful man cannot stand before Him or even in His presence. But God didn’t choose you because of you. He chose you *in Christ*. God didn’t look at you but looked at Jesus hanging on the cross in your behalf. He looked at the robe of Christ’s righteousness in which you were clothed in baptismal waters. *In Christ*, you are holy and blameless in His sight. He looked at you and said: “*I choose you in Christ*,” adopting you into His family.

Paul describes it another way writing:

“In love⁵ [God] predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” (Ephesians 1:4–5)

The word *predestination* has been a source of controversy for the past 500 years. The devil is in the details: “*Did God really say that He predestined all for adoption to Himself or only some for adoption and the others to damnation?*” Last week I quoted Ezekiel where God’s prophet answers that question, saying:

“As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live...” (Ezekiel 33:11)

God desires that everyone repent and believe the Gospel that:

“[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2)

Predestined means that God chose you *in Christ*, for Himself. He knew that Jesus would take care of the way of salvation on Calvary’s cross, for He is:

“... the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Him].” (John 14:6)

To be sure, just because God has predestined all to adoption and salvation, He forces no one into His Kingdom. He compels no one to believe. Unfortunately, many people say “*no thanks*” to God’s gift of salvation believing they’re doing just fine apart from Jesus, remain in unbelief and are destined for eternal damnation.

Predestination, or God's eternal election, covers only those who trust *in Christ* for forgiveness, life, and salvation. (cf: FC Ep XI, 7) It's not that there is something lovable in you that God should love you or desire you as His child. But He doesn't look at you as you are in yourself. He looks at you as you are *in Christ*. In the flesh, you're an offspring from Adam, destined to die. But *in Christ*, bearing every spiritual blessing in heaven, you are a child of God, destined to live in His house forever.

As we have learned in the past several years, we truly don't know what tomorrow will bring... or even the next hour. Trials and tribulations, disease and disaster. The sinful man always works overtime in attempt to guarantee his future. But the past, present, and future are all in God's hands. The good news is that *in Christ* there is no need to attempt to control the future, because the future is guaranteed by Christ. It might not look like in the midst of your turmoil and pain, but you have God's Word you are blessed *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

"⁷ In him [you] have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of [y]our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7)

To redeem means: ***"to buy back; to free from what distresses or harms; to free from captivity by payment of ransom."*** (Merriam Webster) God so loved the world that He:

"... sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)

On the cross you were bought back and redeemed. You were freed from the distress of death, and the grave. You were freed from the captivity of your sin. Not redeemed with gold and silver but with the holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death of Jesus. We sometimes call it the Great Exchange. The Righteous in exchange for the unrighteous. Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (cf: Mark 10:45) He became a slave so that you might be God's free child.

"... though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

So when you're feeling down and out, think your life has no value, repent. Jesus thought your life was to die for. He knew that you were worth the redemption price of His own blood shed on a cross to save you. Regardless of how it looks on this side of heaven:

"¹¹ In him [you] have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." (Ephesians 1:11)

If God is at work in all things to accomplish His plan, you and I can trust that our salvation is secure in His good and gracious hands, even when it doesn't look like it. He planned for your salvation *in Christ* from before the foundation of the world. Paul continues saying:

"¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14)

You are blood-bought, paid in full, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit in Baptism who is your guarantee an eternal inheritance. But before there is an inheritance, someone has to die. The death of Jesus seals your inheritance as God's child. And that inheritance becomes yours in your dying and rising, even though right now it's yours by faith. Jesus is your priceless treasure. In this life, you may lose everything: your life, goods, fame, children, spouse, everything you worked for and everything you have. None of it comes with a guarantee. Nothing lasts. Unless Jesus returns soon, everybody dies. But there is one thing that stands sure: God chose you **in Christ** before the foundation of the world. You have an eternal inheritance in heaven that surpasses anything you can ever imagine in this world.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has done all the work. You and I merely receive all of His spiritual blessings. The best is yet to come, but in the meantime, we don't just sit around and wait. Paul writes in the next chapter:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8–10)

God planted faith within you and faith cannot be shut in. Fruits of faith always flow forth from the love of the One who first loved you. A believer is ready to serve everybody wherever he can. (cf: Law and Gospel, Walther, 293) He cannot help but share the love of Christ and His spiritual blessings with his friends and neighbors. Because, perhaps they have not heard that they too, are blessed **in Christ** and predestined for adoption through Jesus Christ. How can they believe if they have not heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation, so that the Holy Spirit can work faith in them? They, too, have been chosen for salvation – but need someone to plant the seed of the Gospel so that they may bear fruit. **In Christ**, God grant that your fruit should abide.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.