

**The Beloved Community**  
**Ephesians 1:3-14**

**Let us pray. Thank you, O God, for bringing us together here today, to worship and praise you. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our blessed Redeemer. Amen.**

When I was a teenager, I would regularly attend youth groups, trips and retreats. Before we would leave on trips, the pastor would often gather us together for prayer, and then, before we got on the van, he would say...

“Remember who you are, whose you are, and why you are.”

That was, of course, his nice and more dignified way of telling us to **behave ourselves**. To be honest, it was several years of hearing this, before I really realized what he was saying. But when I did finally understand his words, it became something I looked forward to with each outing; a reminder of my value and worth in Christ, and my purpose in serving him.

It is this same sort of declaration that we hear in these opening words from Ephesians this morning. It is so comforting and reassuring to hear this reminder of God’s claim on my life through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing that comes from heaven. God **chose** us in Christ to be holy and blameless in God’s presence before the creation of the world.

God **destined** us to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ because of his love. This was according to his goodwill and plan and to honor his glorious grace that he has given to us freely through the Son whom he loves.

We have been ransomed through his Son’s blood, and we have **forgiveness** for our failures based on his overflowing grace, which he poured over us with wisdom and understanding.” (Eph 1:3-8)

- Basically, everything that is bad in us is taken away.

- In Christ Jesus we are made new!
- Just let that soak in for a minute; )
- It's nothing short of amazing!

Sisters and Brothers, we cannot be effective workers in God's Kingdom if we do not first have confidence in our status as beloved children of God as people made new in Christ's love.

So as the writer opens his letter to the young church in Ephesus, he begins with a reminder of God's gracious claim on every person there. It is a claim which extends even to us, even now!

I think it's fair to say that from time to time, we all struggle with doubt and shame. We question our self-worth. We question our ability to fulfill God's calling upon our lives. And even if that's not something we deal with individually, perhaps we are concerned about our church—we despair and worry about the church's future.

And this happens because our society – or maybe even the Devil -- tells us that we are too weak and insignificant to really make a difference in the world.

Despite our knowledge of God's work and blessings in our lives, it can be difficult to trust in God's belief in us.

- So, we need to hear these words to Ephesians this morning
- We need to be reminded that
- we ARE the blessed,
- we are the chosen,
- We are the adopted, and
- We are the forgiven children of God.

But here's the thing, it's not ONLY about us. These words to the church in Ephesus remind us of that. Think about it this way.

Remember when you were a kid, and you stood at the edge of a pond, and there was a rock there, what would you do?

You'd throw it in, right? Would that rock just slip under the surface of the water without a trace?

Of course not. If you were awesome like my brother, you could make it skip two or three times. But – as it hit – it would create a ripple of waves that would extend out across the pond.

Being a disciple – being the church -- means not only that we are secure in our identity as the beloved of God, but also that we are engaged in making a difference for Christ in the world.

God's claim in our lives must mean something. It ripples out into the world -- touching the lives of others with the same blessing, forgiveness, and grace!

God's blessings should never just hit us and then slip beneath the surface. It should change us. And, in changing us, it should touch and change the lives of others with God's love. We aren't chosen for our own sake, but for the sake of what God wants to accomplish through us.

We make a difference because in us Christ makes a difference.

You see, as soon as the writer is done reminding us of our identity in Christ, he launches us into the world. He explains that in Christ we see God's "plan for us -- to bring all things together in Christ, the things in heaven along with the things on earth."

Just as we can have doubts and insecurities about ourselves, so too can we easily be tempted to believe that the earth is also facing challenges of faith. All you have to do is turn on the news and you are bombarded with awful reports from our community and around the world. But, if we take this scripture text to heart, then we cannot give up hope in anyone or anything, in our neighborhood or in any nation.

- Just as God in Christ Jesus has called and claimed each one of us,
- just as we are made new by the love of God,

- so does our Lord have a plan to renew “all things,”
- every part of this world.

## PAUSE

- When you look at this world, what do you see as hopeless?
- PAUSE
  - Is it impoverished children in our community and around the world?
  - Is it wandering refugees with no resources and no homeland?
  - Is it unsettled regions like the Middle East or Africa where there is so much fighting and genocide?
  - Is it cancer, or racism, or natural disasters, or drug addictions?
  - Is it depression or anxiety or mental health issues?
  - We face so many challenges in our world.
  - 
  - It’s so easy for us to get caught up in all the challenges we face.
  - But what if we looked at the world with a different mindset?
  - What if we had that sort of child-like faith?
  - What if we had the faith that Christ himself describes?

Suddenly, our outlook on life changes, doesn’t it?

Suddenly, all that seems so desperate and hopeless is instead drawn up in the plan of God revealed in Christ.

Suddenly, we can have hope that God will redeem all that bad, working good even from the horrendous and making “all things” new.

After all, that is the gospel story, right?

Christ will redeem and save this world. That’s what makes it “good news.” This is what Christ has done for each of us, and it is what God in Christ Jesus will do for the whole world.

God has even given us a “down payment” as proof that he is continually at work redeeming the world, bringing about good all around us. That’s what we are told in this scripture from Ephesians.

“You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit because you believed in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the down payment on our inheritance, which is applied toward our redemption as God’s own people, resulting in the honor of God’s glory.” (Ephesians 1:11-12)

The Holy Spirit, in our lives and in the life of the church, is God’s very own presence, leading and guiding us to our greater inheritance.

The Holy Spirit living within us is a way of life, a life so lived that it results in “the honor of God’s glory.”

The people of Ephesus are known for their joy in what Christ is doing to redeem aching souls and a suffering world.

- So...what about us?
- How are we known by those around us?
- Are we perceived as a joyful people in Christ?
- Are our churches a powerful representation of “good news” in this community?

I think we all need to hear this loud and clear this morning.

We are called to be a people who see the good that God is doing in this world every day. AND we must lift it up and celebrate God’s good work at all times.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we must also be a part of God’s redeeming activity in the world.

We need to be bearers of the Good News!

Just imagine the impact we could have in our community if each of us consistently focused on what God is doing in our midst and in the midst of a troubled world.

Just imagine if we believed – we truly and passionately believed -- in our own worth as children called and claimed by God and we worked every day for the good that God desires for all things!

In a world with so much that is negative and bad, I'd rather cling to the truth – that Christ brings—a story of goodness, of life, and of hope.

Let's remember who we are, and whose we are, and why we are as we reach out in love to our community and our world.

**Let us pray.**

**Lord Jesus, we love you so much.**

**Thank you for all you have done for us.**

**Thank you for your call for us to be your people...**

■ **To love our neighbor...**

■ **To spread your love....**

**May it all start – right here – today – as we worship and praise your name.**

**Amen.**