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.

I hope that you were able to enter into the rich, beautiful language of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians that David just read for us. This passage has been described as a “mouthful for the lector.” I didn’t warn David about that when we asked him to read this for us this morning. I knew that his acting training and his deep faith would give him the tools he would need to bring this text to life for us, this “resounding song of hope,” as it’s been called. The words flow in an endless stream of praise and wonder, as if intended to lift us to the very heart of God.

This powerful, lyrical passage is all about who we are in the sight of God, who we are through the love and grace of God. God, who has ‘blessed us in Christ,’ who ‘chose us in Christ,’ who ‘blessed us for adoption as children of God,’ God who ‘freely bestows glorious grace on us,’ who ‘lavishes on us the richness of grace.’

Can you take that all in, church? If you were feeling a bit down coming to worship, or somewhat discombobulated by messages about COVID and the variants and what all that might or might portend for our life together in the coming weeks, or whatever, I hope you let the healing balm of the Word of God wash over you like a cleansing stream of love and grace and hope. Do you hear echoes of the 23rd Psalm? “You, O God, anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Hear it again in Ephesians: “Blessed by God who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, who destined us in love to be God’s children through Jesus Christ, to the praise of God’s glorious grace freely bestowed on us in the Beloved…”

Let’s be clear that all this is a gift of God’s doing, a gift from God because it’s how God wants to be, what God wants to do. All this doesn’t come to us because we are special, or cool, or holy, or generous, or likeable, or anything…it’s all because this is how God IS towards us. It’s not because we, or some of us anyway, are predestined to be in God’s favor, as some Christians have wanted to say. Nope—God gives freely to all. It’s not even because we’ve tried really hard to be “good,” and checked off all the boxes and somehow earned enough points to be loved. Nope. It’s about God’s fathomless love and God’s amazing grace.

I hope you can just pause here for a moment, take a deep breath, feel all that tension in your shoulders relax away, and simply pray: “thank you, God.” Thank you. The 13th century German theologian, Meister Eckhardt put it this way: “If the only prayer you ever say is ‘thank you,’ it will be enough.”

Thank you, God. I remember, now, who I am and who you are. This remembering is a profound source of grounding and laughter and strength. For our God will wipe away all tears from our eyes and fill our mouths with laughter. We feel ourselves covered, as if by a prayer quilt, with love that is tender, excessive, and richly abundant.

From that still point, I want you invite you to span out to see the fuller scope of all that God is doing here, for while the vision here in Ephesians is deeply personal, it is not individualistic. The language here is always in the plural—not “me,” but rather “we” and “us.” We are lifted into something much greater than ourselves. Paul’s vision moves us beyond ourselves, beyond even our own community of faith, all the way out to the world and the universe. He announces that in Christ we see God’s “plan for the fullness of
time, to gather up all things, things in heaven and on earth." As our quartet will sing in their anthem: "Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone, chosen of the Lord, and precious, binding all the church in one."

This, right here, is the grounding of all that we do in mission, for the well-being of others. All that we do with Habitat for Humanity, with the Westside Food Bank, with the Red Cross, with Upward Bound House, all that we do in Appalachia and New Orleans and Haiti. It's because we know that God's loving intent is surely not for ourselves alone, but for all God's people everywhere. Our lives are much bigger than we ever might have thought and our relationships much more extensive and inclusive.

So, now what? The ever-creating Spirit of God renews us and makes a new people. We are blessed to be a blessing far and wide. Paul, as one commentator puts it, imagines the church living as a people known for our joy in what Christ is doing to redeem aching souls and a suffering world, our consistent focus being on what God doing in our midst and what God is doing amidst the world.

Blessed to be a blessing. Living life to the praise of God's glory, a journey towards redemption as God's own people and towards the fullness of life for all. As Teresa of Avila said so long ago: "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands, but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks with compassion at the world; yours are the feet on which he is to go about doing good; yours are the hands with which he blesses people now."

We are blessed to be a blessing, servants and shapers of the future God has prepared before all time. A future of hope and healing for all. Through the power and grace of our ever-creating God, we can remember a future for our lives fulfilled far beyond what we now can see. We can remember a future for this world far different from the one our eyes now see. We can remember a future graced by joy and righteousness and peace.

These are good words for the living of these days, these complicated and often perplexing days. We live each day in joy and assurance. We love, because God first loved us. We live forward, in faith and hope. We are a vibrant, faithful community of God's beloved children—praising God, growing in love, reaching out in faithful service here and around the world.

We are part of something bigger than ourselves, something lasting and enduring, something holy and beautiful and true. May the presence of God's Creating Spirit bring you joy and purpose, imagination and peace. Thanks be to God! AMEN

Notes: