



Northeastern
Ohio Synod

Summer Sabbath Sermon Series - 2024

Proper 15 - 8th Sunday after Pentecost - July 14, 2024

Texts for the Sunday (all three referenced in the sermon):

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12-19

Ephesians 1: 3-14

Mark 6:14-29

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Ephesians 1:3-14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In 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, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In 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; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Sermon Text:

This sermon was written by our Bishop, Laura Barbins. She has chosen to prepare this sermon on the Ephesians 1:3-14.

Many years ago Bishop Barbins went to her community festival day - back in those days it was called "Better in Mentor." It was a typical sort of community fair: rides, midway games, fried food, and community booths. She and her family were walking around and there was a tent with a local church who was doing face painting - their four young daughters were immediately drawn in. Who can say no to face painting?

Of course, as the children were getting faces painted, the members of the congregation were witnessing to the parents. Here she was, a Lutheran pastor (unbeknownst to them) and the first question out of this good evangelical disciple's mouth was, "Are you right with Jesus?"

And, being a good Lutheran disciple, she responded, "Well yes, because I am baptized!"

"Well, baptism is not enough."

Now, we could use this as an opportunity to talk about how this evangelical Christian was coming at theology from somewhere different than I. Or about how he was "wrong." But the fact of the matter is - many of us believe this in our hearts. That baptism alone is not enough. That we must, in the words of Matthew 25, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned. That what **we do** with our baptism is just as important as what God did for us in baptism.

It makes sense, actually, because we live in such an action based, individually activated society. We won't get a promotion unless we prove ourselves. We are awarded degrees just because we are good people, we work for them. We have to earn a living, earn our reputation, earn our right to speak.

It is not so with God. God has chosen a completely different way of interacting with us. It is utterly alien to us.

Which is precisely why it is so hard for us to grasp.

Not to mention that the writer or Ephesians makes it really hard to understand. So, for the next few minutes, let's listen to the Ephesians reading from The Message paraphrase of the same text that was read this morning. I'll intersperse some narrative within it as well.

Listen again - and anew - to portions Ephesians chapter 1:

1:3-6 How blessed is God! And what a blessing God is! God is the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing. Long before God laid down earth's foundations, God had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of love, to be made whole and holy by God-love. Long, long ago God decided to adopt us into the divine family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure God took in planning this!) God

wanted us to enter into the celebration of this lavish gift-giving by the hand of the beloved Son.

Do you hear this? How much love and pleasure God had for us even before we were created? We are the FOCUS of God's love. But more than that, the love that God has for us makes up for all our shortfalls. You know that saying, "Love is blind"? Well, maybe that love is blind because love fills in the cracks of our faults and makes us want to be better - to live up to the eyes of the one who loves us! So, God loves us, takes pleasure with us, and wants us to celebrate with Trinity... to join the dance of Trinity as the song in our hymnal goes.

The writer continues:

7-10 Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! God thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans God took such delight in making. God set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.

Free! Abundantly free! Do you know what that means? Abundantly free of the penalties and punishments chalked up by our misdeeds? There are no more musts. That's what that means - no more musts. In Christ, we are made free - period. And God loves us wholly and completely just as we are. When we misstep, when we are selfish, when we try to make our own way, when we try to be the god of our own lives... all of it - loved into perfection by GOD. Not by what we do or don't do. Loved because that is the nature of God.

And do you know where this is guaranteed for us? The writer of Ephesians concludes the section:

13 It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit.

This last verse might invoke two things for you.

The first is our baptismal liturgy when we mark the newly baptized with the cross of Christ on their brow with the words, "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."

The second is the Stevie Wonder Song, *Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm yours!* You know the one, yes? It goes a little something like this...

(IF POSSIBLE, PLAY A PORTION OF THE SONG HERE - OR SING IT IF YOU CAN! IF NOT CONTINUE WITH THE BRACKETED PART)

[remove the "it goes a little something like this..." above and say - do you remember this Motown hit? Stevie Wonder sitting at the keyboard, the backup singers crowning behind him the whole time - Here I am baby, signed, sealed, delivered, I'm yours!]

Now, I know we all know the repeated refrain, but the lyrics near the end? They are:

*Here I am, baby
(Signed, sealed, delivered, I'm yours)
You got my future in your hands, baby, yeah*

*I've done a lot of foolish things
That I really didn't mean
I could be a broken man
But here, I, ah, with your future, got your future, baby*

God has a future in mind for us - a future with hope. And a present with hope. And in both of those, nothing but abundant freedom and love. A love that has claimed us just as we are in the waters of baptism, and also transforms us into the people that God sees we can be. But, my dear people, there is no more must to reach this blessed place. There is no more when I, then I might be loved. No, God has loved us from the very beginning - a love that is so great, so deep, so wide, that we could never do enough to earn it. And thanks be to God that God says, "My child, you do not need to. For you are signed, sealed, and delivered - and you are mine."