

SERMON
Ephesians 1:3-14
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 14, 1024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let us pray...Speak O Lord Your word of life to us and may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to You, our Rock and our Redeemer. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

God's message for us today is based on our text from Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Pastor Fritsche asked me to begin an eight-week sermon series on the Epistle readings from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I will be covering the first two of these and when Pastor Fritsche returns from vacation he will conclude with the last six, which will cover all the Sundays from today up to the September long weekend.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has six chapters and in preparation for listening to God's Word each week I might encourage you to read through this letter every week, one chapter each day from Monday to Saturday. Consider this your mission as you join God in His mission.

Indeed, God has a mission. In fact, God has been on a very specific mission since the day humanity broke fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden. And that mission is to restore or reunite humanity with its Creator – to bring all people and all creation back into fellowship or we might say, back into relationship with our God.

St. Paul described that mission and how God would accomplish it in our epistle reading today. Allow me to once again read part of it.

*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.... ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, **to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.***

God's mission is to unite all things in Christ, and He has made that union possible through what Christ has done for us through His life, death and resurrection. This is God's mission and God has accomplished the hardest part of that mission – by living, dying and rising for our salvation.

God's saving work is done, completed, and yet to bring that salvation of God's grace in Christ to the whole world throughout time, God has done something else....

Someone once coined the phrase, "The Church does not have a mission, but God's mission has a Church." (repeat) And that Church began with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the people of Israel. God called and gathered them into a holy nation and set them apart for His purpose of blessing all nations. They were to bless all nations through their worship and witness and service to God and neighbour, but more importantly, it would be through them that God would bring the promised blessing of a Saviour.

However, like their first father and mother, Adam and Eve, the Old Testament Church broke fellowship with God time and time again, even though they were often blind to this reality.

It is for this reason that God had to send them messengers like Ezekiel who we heard from today. God sent such men to prophesy judgment upon His people in order to call them back into the good news of fellowship with their God.

This call to repentance and to faith in God, however, was welcomed by very few. For most, their hearts were hardened to God and far from Him, even as they continued to go through the motions of religion without its true power. This was the Church into which God eventually came in the flesh of Jesus Christ to continue His mission to reunite all people and all creation.

Now it is in Christ, Paul reminds us, that God chose to bless people with every spiritual blessing required to be the children of God; so that they might be in fellowship with their God.

It would be through Christ, that God would again call people to repentance and faith in Him. Through Christ, God established the means by which people would become His adopted children. This was first seen when Christ entered into the waters of baptism, taking upon Himself our sins. It was fulfilled through the baptism of His own shed blood on the cross, enabling the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation for all who believe and are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection.

Now what God does through Christ's life, death and resurrection may appear quite mysterious, since not everyone believes it, and yet it became the *word of truth, the gospel or good news* message of God's salvation by which those first disciples, through faith, would become the new Church, the new Israel.

Like their Master who was sent into the world, those first disciples would be sent out to bring this message of God's desire to reunite all people with their Lord.

Jesus sent his own disciples out on this mission, a mission that was first directed toward that Old Testament Church, Israel, calling them to repentance – giving them another chance. Even so, relatively few received it in faith, but to those who did, they *were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*, ¹⁴*who is the guarantee of our inheritance* – as St. Paul writes.

In the Book of Acts we read about God's mission expanding beyond the people of Israel to include all nations. It was through men like Paul that the Good News of God's blessing in Christ came to the people of Ephesus. Some of these people received that Gospel and began meeting together with joy and thanksgiving to receive again and again the spiritual blessings of God's Word. They were baptized and equipped to take the good news of Christ to those they would encounter.

And as a result, God's mission to bless people by bringing them back into fellowship with Him through Christ reached out to more and more people so that today we are here because of what God did in the lives of those who had been restored and reunited way back then and who went out to call others into this fellowship in Christ. This is how God continues to work in every generation.

Even so, over all of these centuries of God blessing His people, the Church today is still a mixed bag. Some parts of the Church have again separated themselves from God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and walk in darkness. Some parts of the Church continue to gather but have left behind the power of the Gospel and replaced it with other kinds of focuses. And then there is the true Church that continues to live life together around Word and Sacrament, in the joy of Christ's presence and who continue to take that joy out into the world around them.

So, what part of the Church are we? Where is your life in Christ? Well, despite what the Church has done or not done; what you have done or not done; one thing is for sure....God continues to be faithful.

God continues to be in mission, seeking to reunite all people in Christ. In every part of God's Church God has provided every spiritual blessing in Christ. In all these places where God's people gather in His name, God is still calling people to be holy and blameless before Him; adopting them as His children through their baptism into Christ Jesus.

In every part of God's Church, the Holy Spirit continues to bring the gift of God's redemption in Christ through water and the Word and in the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. In every place and time, the Holy Spirit is working to seal people – to guarantee their salvation.

Yes, God is on a mission to bless all people in Christ and to reunite them in fellowship with their God. And to accomplish that mission, God's mission has a Church – that's you and me. Yes, like Ezekiel, the Lord as called us and said, "Son of man, I send you..."

Yes, we are a sent people, sent out to call to repentance those in our lives who are walking apart from God, inviting them into the blessing of Christ's forgiveness, life and salvation; the fellowship God desires for them too.

Will that be easy? Well, from the stories of Ezekiel and John the Baptist and Paul and our Lord Jesus Christ, we quickly learn that this mission, God's mission is anything but easy.

And yet, for those whom the Lord has chosen before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him and who in love, has predestined for adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, this mission, God's mission is our mission and in faith we respond as Luther wrote in his explanation to the Creed:

For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him....that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. This is most certainly true. Amen.

Now may the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our risen Lord and Saviour. Amen.