

August 6, 2023

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin

Ephesians 1:3-10

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord!

The city of Ephesus was an important stop for Paul on his second and third missionary journeys. He wanted to go there at the beginning of the second journey, but the vision of the man from Macedonia caused him and his companion to head to Troas on the west coast of Asia Minor and cross the Aegean Sea to Philippi. But several years later he came to Ephesus on his way to his home congregation in Antioch. It was a two year stay. At the beginning of the third journey he came back to Ephesus and this time stayed three-year stay. So we can understand why the believers there had a special place in Paul's heart as he wrote this letter. This letter is one of Paul's "prison letters" for he was under house arrest in Rome for the first time when he wrote to the Ephesians. Listen now to the opening of his letter.

Ephesians 1:3-10

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

Have you ever received a letter from prison? I never have. I am guessing that most of you maybe none have either – unless you have a pen pal in jail. To me this doesn't sound like a letter from prison. I would expect to hear anger, vengeance, fear, frustration, despair, etc. But not Paul. He is filled with praise and joy and thanksgiving over what blessings he had received from our gracious God. In fact he is so filled with thankful joy that he writes a run-on sentence with 214 Greek words. That sentence really goes through verse 14. English translations, which break it down into shorter sentences have about 280 words. Can you imagine your English teacher trying to diagram this sentence? Do you remember how to do diagramming? Breaking out the verb and the subject? The objects and prepositional phrases and then the adjectives and adverbs and conjunctions? We would need series of video panels to do that electronically! Let's not fault Paul for writing this run-on sentence! That happens easily when you are simply overwhelmed with emotions as you rejoice in blessings received. I pray that you, as we look at what had so filled up Paul's heart, will also be overwhelmed with the blessings which are yours through Jesus Christ! Paul's words this morning urge us to:

EMBRACE THE WEALTH GOD HAS GIVEN That's His Choice; That's His revelation

Did you notice how Paul's emphasis is always and only on what God has willed and done? His repeated throughout this run-on sentence is not what Paul has done but rather on God's plan carried out in Jesus Christ. It is God's choice to provide so abundantly and make us spiritually wealthy.

The first blessing from God that Paul says has made us spiritually wealthy is that "he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless." This is absolutely that in God's eyes we are holy and blameless. If I were to break you into groups of four or five and ask you to be totally honest and open about our lives without hiding anything, I doubt that I would be very successful. But if that happened we would be shocked at how there are secret sins in all of us that are so shameful and guilt-producing. But now our life is

different. Through Jesus we are cleansed of the past and have the perfect, pure, and holy life of Jesus credited to us. This is the spiritual wealth that is ours through Jesus.

Paul continues to speak of our spiritual wealth: "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will." There is little difference between being chosen by God and being predestined. Out of his grace and mercy God has brought us into his family. In a few weeks it will be 72 years since I was born to life outside my mother's womb. My parents had no choice. They had to take me home. But I was not born as child of God into this world. I was born without God and without hope. St. Paul says in the next chapter that when I was born physically I was dead in trespasses and sins. But through Holy Baptism I was adopted and placed into this wonderful position of being a child of God with a special relationship with my heavenly Father. It cost me nothing. It cost Jesus his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death.

In fact, Paul says, In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. My blood isn't worth much. When we donate blood, they poke our finger to check our iron level to make sure that our blood will be helpful to the recipient. What happens to that blood? It gets wiped off with a piece of cotton. Our finger gets squeezed a couple of times and the blood is wiped away and then finally a drop is gathered to be tested. That piece of cotton is either thrown into the hazardous waste or gets attached to our finger with a piece of tape and we are told to keep it there for an hour. Then we unwrap our finger and the cotton with our blood is thrown away. But the blood of Jesus is much more precious. Though invisible to our sight, that precious blood amazingly washes us clean from our sins. What wealth is ours in Jesus!

There is still one more word for us to note that urges us to embrace this wealth which our gracious God has given us freely of his own choice. Paul says that God has "lavished on us" these marvelous spiritual blessings. He has filled us up with them and they are overflowing. They will never run out.

Paul encourages us to embrace this spiritual wealth because it was solely God's choice to pour them out on us. Paul also wants us to understand that the knowledge of this wealth which God has chosen to give us is all ours through his revelation.

He writes: With all wisdom and understanding, made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Perhaps Paul is thinking here of that time on the road to Damascus, when he was going to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and death. But Jesus appeared to him in that bright light and after being blinded for three days his sight was restored. He was led by God to the wilderness where Jesus taught him for three years. What had been a total mystery to him was now understandable. The Holy Spirit continued to reveal mysteries to Paul and through Paul to generation upon generation of Christians. 13 of the 27 New Testament books were written by Paul as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Good News of Jesus as it comes to us through the Word and the Sacraments continue to assure us of the spiritual wealth that is ours in Jesus. As you receive Christ's body and blood this morning in, with, and under the bread and wine our gracious God assures you that you are spiritually wealthy.

Despite God's revelation to us in his Word, through Baptism and Lord's Supper, mystery still remains. We still don't understand the mind of God, the why and the how of the spiritual wealth which God provides. But someday we will – "when the times reach their fulfillment." For the individual believer's soul that will happen in the moment of death when that soul goes to be with the Lord forever. Then that would will have perfect peace and complete joy and all mysteries will be clear. On that last great day Jesus will return to raise the dead and take believers' bodies to rejoin their souls in heaven. Then forever God's choice will be clear and his revelation complete.

Surely we can join with Paul in saying: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Embrace the wealth God has given! It is yours by his choice and his revelation. Amen.

– Pastor Joel Jaeger