

The 8th Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: July 15, 2018

Ephesians 1:3-14: *Blessed Be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you noticed one of the words in vogue in our society today is the word, “blessed?” After a swim last Tuesday afternoon, my Grandson Mitchell and I stopped into Burger King. The young lady in the drive through handed me our lunch and said, “Have a blessed day.” I hear people say to me quite often when talking about their children. “I am so blessed.” A guy talking about his job says, “I received the promotion that I’ve been waiting for, I feel so blessed!” So, what does it mean to be blessed?

Today, St. Paul says to us in the first chapter of Ephesians: “*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.

It would be impossible to explore in depth the complete meaning of Paul's words today, but this is an important passage. Let's see where it leads us. For one thing, what does it mean that we have been blessed by God? Paul writes, *"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,"* So, what does that mean? Does it mean that everything's going our way? Maybe yes or maybe no. Maybe it means something entirely different. (PAUSE)

Have you ever noticed special needs adults bagging groceries at your local super market? I'm in Stop & Shop checking out and I'm watching this young man taking his job very seriously. You see, the young man has Down syndrome. As he bags my groceries, he does his job so conscientiously. When he is finished, I thank him and he moves to push the grocery cart out the door. So I say to him, I may look like an old man, but I can push my groceries to the car. But the young man insists that helping me to the car with the groceries is part of his job. So, I dutifully lead the man to my car. He opens the trunk and carefully places the grocery bags inside. I say thank you. Then the young man

does something that startles me and catches me way off-guard. He puts his arms around my waist and hugs me. He says, “I like you!” I, in turn, say the only thing I can come up with, “I like you, too. You are the best grocery bagger I have ever seen.” The young man says, “My boss says I’m his best worker.” I said, I’m sure your boss says that. Thank you so much for your service. You made my day.”

Thinking about that moment I found something quite touching. Now, some will say that when I see that young man in Heaven, he will have been made whole. In other words, they think he will be like the rest of us, you know those of us who think we are “normal.” But I wondered, my sisters and brothers, I wonder if, when by God’s grace I am made whole, if I will be more like that young man than he like me. You see, I saw in this lovely man with Down’s syndrome the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. My friend was blessed with all those qualities and none of the pride or meanness that so often afflicts all of us.

What a beautiful understanding of what it means to be blessed. Usually when we think of being blessed, we think of things like being blessed financially, or being blessed with good health, or an abundance of talent, or an attractive

appearance. Then we turn to Matthew's Gospel and the first thing we run into are the Beatitudes:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad . . .” (Matthew 5:4-12)

Is that what most people think when they say, “I am so blessed”? I really don't think so. In fact, you can be blessed financially and physically and in terms of such things as talent or intelligence or appearance and lose your soul. Your financial abundance can blind you to the needs of others; your physical well-being may make you insensitive to those who are suffering. Your talents or intellect or attractiveness can delude you into thinking that you are a self made man or a self made woman, so self-sufficient and too proud to no longer

need others, to no longer need the church, to no longer need God. Can you begin to see that some of the things you count as blessings can turn out to be the worst thing that ever happened to you? Just ask someone who has won the lottery. There is a very old saying, “Be careful what you wish for.”

So, ask yourself, are you blessed? I mean are you truly blessed. Are you living to the best of your ability in the center of God’s will for your life? St. Paul knew what it was to be blessed and he spent most of his last years in a Roman prison, not because of any wrongdoing on his part but because of his deep faith in and loyalty to Jesus Christ. Yet it is he who writes, “*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,* So that’s the first thing we need to see: We are blessed.

Second, we have been chosen by God. Here again being chosen may mean something quite different from what we may think. Paul writes: *just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.* Again, that may mean something different than we suppose. Normally we think of being chosen as an honor or an award that we have won: Chosen for the football team, chosen to be accepted into medical school, chosen to be a cheerleader, chosen for a sorority, chosen for a

promotion, etc. Usually we are chosen for some virtue or strength or attribute we may possess. And this is something that we look forward to. We may even brag about it. We have been chosen. Well, long before we were chosen by God, the children of Israel were chosen by God. How has that worked out for our Jewish sisters and brothers, God's chosen people? We only need one word, Holocaust.

In the famous play, *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye, the leading character, is a pious Jewish peasant living in a small Russian village who loves to stare up into the sky and argue with God. In one particularly dark moment, when everything seems to be going wrong in his little Jewish community, Tevye looks toward the sky and says to God: "It's true we are the Chosen People. But once in a while can't you choose someone else?"

My guess is that millions of our Jewish friends over the ages have asked God that same question, for there have been few minorities persecuted as they have been. So what does it mean to say, "We have been chosen by God"? Israel was chosen to be a blessing to the world, not to receive blessings, but to give them. Being chosen was an honor for that ancient people, but it was also a burden. Being chosen certainly doesn't mean that God loved them or loves us more than any other people. We are a prosperous people, but it is a very dangerous

thing to say we have been chosen for prosperity. When we say “we have been chosen by God,” it is more like the Uncle Sam posters recruiting soldiers and sailors for World Wars I and II. We weren’t around during that difficult time, but most of us know about them. The posters show a stern-faced Uncle Sam wearing a top hat over his flowing white hair and pointing directly at the viewer. In bold letters across the bottom, the poster reads, “UNCLE SAM WANTS YOU.” The soldiers and sailors who were recruited by those posters were lured chiefly by love of country. They certainly did not expect any special favors. They were recruited to make the world safe from fascist tyranny and to protect our precious democracy. They were recruited because they believed in the idea of freedom.

We are being recruited because we believe in Jesus Christ. Our task is to bring people into the family of God. God has in mind a new world order. God’s new world order means that every person in this world will live in dignity and harmony as children of God under the Lordship of Christ. That is God’s new world order. As disciples of Jesus Christ, you and I are the agents of God’s plan and we serve as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. We are blessed and we have been chosen to be God’s ambassadors, as Israel was, to be a blessing to the earth.

So, where do we begin? That is the challenge this week. We begin right here, right now by reaching out in love to everyone with whom we come into contact. When we as the church of Jesus Christ fulfill that one simple mission, the gates of hell cannot long endure.

Here is the third thing we need to see. Far beyond being blessed and being chosen, we have been adopted into God's own family. I read a story about a Sunday school teacher in Vermont who was registering the children for the fall semester. She asked two brothers their ages and birthday. One of the two boys said, "We're both seven. My birthday is April 8, 1976, and my brother's is April 20, 1976." The teacher was a little confused and said, "But that's impossible!" The other brother said, "No, it's not, one of us is adopted."

Before she was even aware that she had asked, the words came out, "Which one?" The boys looked at each other and smiled. Then one of them said, "We asked Dad that a while ago, but he just said he loved us, and he couldn't remember any more which one was adopted."

My sisters and brothers, it's beautiful when it works that way. In God's family we are all adopted. We are adopted to be children of God, adopted to be brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful thing it is to be blessed, to be chosen, to be adopted. It doesn't mean that God loves us any

more than He loves everyone else. It doesn't mean that life is going any easier than it does for anyone else. What it means and what it promises is that our lives will always have meaning and purpose because we are the eyes, ears, tongue, hands, arms, feet and legs of Jesus in this world today. Amen.