

Sermon for July 15, 2018
“The Body of Christ: Blessed to be a Blessing”

Ephesians 1:3-14

“I am the church. You are the church. We are the church together” What does it mean to be the church? What is church? The early church wrestled with this question. Even those outside the church could not make out who they were. One early reference in Roman writing referred to Christianity as a “sect of the Jews.”

That made sense because that’s what the church was in the beginning. It was another group within Judaism who had some unique beliefs about a particular teacher who they thought was God! But the church grew beyond that rather quickly. It soon included more Gentiles than Jews. It became a diverse group of Jews and Greeks, slave and free, rich and poor, male and female.

The early church wrestled with this question. In a world with so many different alliances and allegiances and gods, who or what were they? Were they a bunch of Gentiles trying to be Jewish, or a bunch of Jews trying to be Gentiles? Or could they be both, and each different, but still be one?

The church today wrestles with these questions. Some Christians think that we are a voluntary association of like-minded believers. Some think of us as a mutual support society. Some think the church is a place to socialize with nice people. Some think of the church as a religious education center. Some think of it as a place to take a nap. Hello?

The world today tries to use the models it knows to understand the church. Are we a community center? Are we a spiritual fitness club? Are we a country club? Are we a relief agency?

A few verses after the ones we read in Ephesians this morning refers to the church as the Body of Christ. This image of the church as the Body of Christ is all through the book of Ephesians. So today and for the next 6 Sundays we will be looking at what Ephesians tells us about this “Body of Christ.” What does it mean to be the Body of Christ, and how are we the church to live that out?

The first thing that it tell us about the Body of Christ is that we have been blessed. In Christ God has blessed us. And this was not just a spur of the moment thing. God planned from the foundations of the world to bless you. God knew that two thousand the eighteen years after Jesus’ birth you would be here in need of a blessing. So God made plans before speaking the universe into existence to bless you!

Think about that. Over 14 billion years ago, before God started creating the stars and galaxies and planets. Before the Big Bang, God planned to bless you. It says, “He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.”

Before God spoke the first light into existence God planned for a small blue planet to orbit a yellow dwarf star in just the right part of a spiral galaxy for you to live on. And God planned to call an elderly barren couple to have a child that would bring forth a nation. Then through that nation God would come in the Son to be a cosmic intermediary for you. And God sent the Spirit to start a church that would pass on the good news of Jesus. God even stopped a Pharisee named Paul on the road to Damascus so that he could carry that

message to the Gentiles. Centuries later God strangely warmed the heart of a spiritually confused Anglican Priest so that there would be a Methodist church on the corner of Shannon Dr. and Edwards Rd. in Greenville, SC in the USA called Aldersgate, so you could hear the good news. All so that God could bless you as a part of the Body of Christ.

What's the nature of this blessing? Ephesians describes it in these terms: to be holy and blameless, adoption as God's children, glorious grace, redemption, forgiveness, the mystery of his will made known to us, an inheritance. That's a lot to take in. Maybe that's why Ephesians seems to ramble here. It is hard to put it into words.

Basically, through Jesus, God has graciously forgiven us and adopted us as children and made us heirs to a great fortune of love and wisdom. This is no mere earthly fortune of a meager billions of dollars. This is an eternal inheritance of God's holy presence living in us! The magnitude and depth of this blessing almost defies description:

“Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that save a wretch like me...”

“I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene. And wonder how He could love me a sinner, condemned, unclean. Oh, how marvelous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be. How marvelous! How wonderful! Is my Savior's love for me!”

“Amazing Grace will always be my song of praise.

For it was grace, that bought my liberty.

I do not know just why He came to love me so.

He looked beyond my fault and saw my need.

I shall forever lift my eyes to Calvary. To view the cross where Jesus died for me.

How marvelous the grace that caught my falling soul.

He looked beyond my fault and saw my need.”

We are truly blessed. Implicit in this blessing is a purpose. The greatness of this blessing impels us to serve God. We were blessed “so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.” Being blessed we are an example of the blessings of God. Our lives are a praise to God's glory.

This calling is not a burden, it is a joy! God has lavished on us forgiveness and grace, and given us the Holy Spirit! Have you ever seen a child receive a gift that they really, really, liked? They enjoy showing it off to others. It is a joy to say, my Grams, my uncle, my friend gave me this doll or this truck.

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing of heaven! We were called to know Jesus before the creation of the universe. We have been given grace and forgiveness and love! God has even adopted us and made us heirs of the glories of the universe. We have been let in on the cosmic plan to bring it all together in Christ! What a joy to be a part of that plan in Jesus Christ?

You are blessed in Christ Jesus! You were redeemed to be a part of the Body of Christ. Celebrate that gift, and share it with a world full of people whom God wants to bless!