

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
Ephesians 1:3-14
Blessed Be the One Who Has so Blessed Us

St. Paul gushes with blessing and amazement. In the original, there's hardly a break to catch his breath. St. Paul dictated many of his letters. It's hard not to imagine him marching back and forth, waving his hands, and rattling off words faster than any scribe could record them. Do you see what happens when you look into the saving mysteries of our Lord? You overflow, just as God's grace has overflowed for you.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings, with heavenly things in Christ." Blessed, blessed, blessings—notice the repetition of words. Why bless Father and Son? Because Father and Son have already blessed us. God has established and initiated the joyful relationship in which we now take part. Heaven has been brought low to us in Christ. "In Christ," is St. Paul's refrain. There is no relationship with God, no love of God, no revelation of God that is not in Christ. He is the anchor of it all.

"as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him in love," This is still the same sentence, as the saving love of God rolls off St. Paul's lips. You have been chosen, chosen by the Father in Christ alone, begotten of the Father from eternity, before the very foundation of the world, for a purpose: to be holy, set apart as consecrated vessels for God's service, and blameless, not-guilty of anything punishable in God's sight. God forgive us when we choose not Him who has chosen us all the way to the cross for no other reason than to make us what we could never be on our own: holy and blameless!

"predestining us for adoption through Jesus Christ as His own, according to the good pleasure of His will," Still the same sentence. St. Paul's celebration of the saving plan conceived in God the Father and made manifest in God the Son just oozes without restraint. The Father looked through His Son and saw us, predestining us, so that, where before stood a ragged and grubby orphan, now He saw a beautiful son or daughter on whom He delighted to dote.

Why? Not because He foresaw our faith. He foresaw us through Jesus Christ, not faith. Not because of our works. He chose us to be holy and blameless, not because we already were. He chose us according to the good pleasure of His will. He wanted to love us. In His compassion, He longed to love the unlovable, to acquit those guilty as sin, not with an wink and a nod, but through Jesus Christ, who became the unlovable, guilty, and punishable Son we should have remained to make us the Father's beloved as He was, is, and forever will be. God forgive us when we lack St. Paul's fervor for blessing Him who has so richly blessed us in His Son!

Thanks be to God that St. Paul wasn't asthmatic like your pastor, because he still doesn't stop to breathe: *"for the praise of the glory of His grace, which He graced us with in the Beloved."* Blessing, blessing, blessing. Christ, Christ, Christ. Now grace, grace, grace—all this done for the praise of the glory of His grace, His undeserved love, with which He graced us, so that now we who were once God's enemies are now beloved in the Beloved, the unbegotten and not adopted, Son, Jesus Christ.

Same sentence still: *"in Him we have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."* To redeem is to buy back. In Christ, and through His blood, shed on the cross and running down your throats in the Lord's Supper, we've been bought back for God's own possession. What is the result of this redemption? The forgiveness of sins. Ransomed, like a kidnapped child, by our loving Father's riches of grace, that is, His beloved Son, in payment for sin, we have become His own possession. God forgive us if we sell back to Satan and the flesh what Christ has bought at such a price! God forgive us if we desire the poverty of human depravity over the riches of our God's grace!

“which He overflowed to us, in all wisdom and thoughtful planning.” Guess what? Same sentence. God acted at just the right time—not spur of the moment; but thoughtfully planned in Christ, the Wisdom of God. Not only did grace trickle down to us, but it overflowed so that the chalice, like the widow of Zarepheth’s oil jar, never runs empty, spilling over with the Blood of the Lamb. The Bread of Life abounds that we might not die in spiritual famine. God forgive us if such overflowing grace is ever seen as insufficient! God forgive us if we question our Father’s thoughtful planning when it has been so superbly evidenced in Christ!

“making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Him.” Same sentence. The Apostle just keeps going. Who can stop to breathe when there are such wonders to recall? God has made known to us the mystery of His will. In the Bible, a mystery is not something we work hard to solve with the clues we find, but rather something otherwise utterly unknowable made known to us by God’s clear revelation alone. The mystery of the Father’s will with regard for us was made plain as day in Christ. How does God feel about sin? Look to Christ, and the horrible price He paid for your sin. How does God feel about you? Look to Christ, and the horrible price He paid for your sin, arms outstretched like a mother hen gathering her chicks in the agony of death, praying for your forgiveness and life in the agony of His passion.

What has God purposed for you? That is a popular question today, but it’s not the mystery some make it out to be. You don’t have to scour for clues. He has purposed your redemption, your forgiveness. God forgive us if we suspect that He who has revealed such magnificent mysteries in His Son would withhold anything we truly need to know for our well-being and salvation! God forgive us if we prefer momentary, fleeting, carnal, and soul-poisoning pleasures over the good pleasure of such a gracious will as our God’s!

“in the economics of the fullness of the times, to one-headify (or bring together under one head) all in the Christ, all which is upon the heavens and all which is upon the earth in Him.” You know what I am going to say: same sentence. God managed, like a good economist, the ups and downs, ebb and flow of the times and then unified heaven and earth under the stairway between heaven and earth, the bridge between God and man, Jesus Christ. God forgive us if we second guess the timing of our LORD who acted in the fullness of time to bring us into the fullness of His grace under one Head, Jesus Christ!

Pretty amazing, huh? Let’s stop to breathe. Now remember all that God has made you, and let it take your breath away again: blessed in Christ, chosen in Christ, adopted in Christ, graced in Christ., redeemed in Christ, saved in Christ., forgiven in Christ., purposed in Christ, united in Christ. Wow! There’s a little bit in there, isn’t there? Keep chewing on it throughout the week. But the feast isn’t over; there’s another course.

“In Him also we have been chosen to be heirs, predestined according to the purpose of the one working all things according to the counsel of His will, in order for us to be to the praise of His glory, having hoped beforehand in the Christ. In Him also, you, having heard the word of the truth, the promise of your salvation, have believed, having been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Whether or not he may have stopped to breathe, St. Paul did not stop gushing. God has given us His Holy Spirit of promise—the One who works through God’s promise to work faith in it—to finish what Christ began, to sustain our hope beforehand, that is, hope for what has not yet come to pass, but nonetheless has been promised. How does the Holy Spirit, Christ’s gift to you to keep Him before your eyes, do this? Through the gospel, which you have heard and believed, which is now deposited in you in this assembly of the saints. What love, beginning, middle, and ending all Christ, sealed by the Spirit. What can those who have been so blessed, chosen, graced, redeemed, saved, forgiven—yes, forgiven, purposed, united, and sealed thus say in the face of such an undeserved turn of events, of identity, of fate? I think all we can say is what St. Paul says: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings, with heavenly things in Christ.”* Amen.