

"The Family"

June 24, 2018

Scripture: Ephesians 1: 3-14

*<sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. <sup>5</sup> He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

*<sup>11</sup> In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup> so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup> this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*



The Family

Pastor John

Today we begin a new series entitled, "No Longer Strangers".

This series focuses in on the letter to the Ephesians, which

teaches the church how to be a community worthy of the gospel. In this letter,

Paul reminds the Ephesians that they are “now in Christ Jesus” and are no longer strangers to God. He also reminds them, more importantly, that they are no longer alienated from each other. Because of their new relationship with Christ, the Ephesian church is experiencing a radical transformation of their identity – both personally and as a community. For the next six weeks, we will explore the wonderful images of the church found in Ephesians, using the family metaphor. This letter of Paul was widely circulated and gave important advice to new communities of faith that were going through some growing pains. With those pains often came hurt feelings and raw emotions. So, during this series we will also study what it looks like to live rooted in reconciliation, both vertically with God and horizontally with neighbor. Let us pray...

When you see the word “family”, what comes to mind? Is it all love and harmony? Is it all bickering and backstabbing? Is it all about blood being thicker than water? Is it all about being right and holding grudges? Is it some combination of these and more? When I think of family, much comes to mind. We laugh, we cry. We hug, we hit. We are brutally honest, we are kindly quiet. To illustrate these things, please turn your attention to the screens as we spend a few minutes with the Stone family.

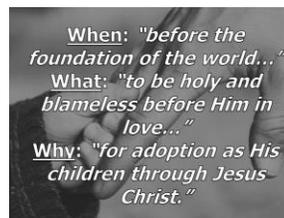


Can you remember a time when you were like Meredith, the new girlfriend or boyfriend who has come to meet the family? There was that awkward first visit or two, when you were

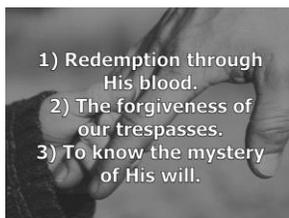
trying to figure out if you really wanted to be a part of this family. At the same time, they were trying to figure out if they really wanted you to be a part of their family. As it was in the movie that I played a clip from, the idea of family is filled with complications and various relationships that are all intertwined. This too is the reality of our church family. We are a body of imperfect people with quirks and opinions and emotions. But we are also the family of God. As such, we are capable of great love and compassion, of deep commitment to one another, and of working together to do amazing things for the kingdom of God. These thoughts invite us to ponder the radical and beautiful possibilities of the church as a family. It was about towards this version of the family of God that Paul was pointing when he addressed the Ephesian church.

This burgeoning family of faith was experiencing some very real human emotions. They were wrestling with prejudice and distrust and being judgmental with one another. Paul saw the need for this newly forming community of faith to focus on developing authentic relationships that were founded upon the love of Christ. Being united as the body of Christ was important. It remains important. How God seeks to unite us was the focus of last week's message that Justin shared with us. God seeks to unite His church, His family, because it is imperative for the mission. The body of Christ needs to be united, not for the sake of being some social club that gathers on Sunday mornings, but to be able to go out into the world to fulfill God's will for the church to spread the gospel.

In the opening chapter of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul begins by establishing our place in the family of God. Paul begins with when God chose us: *"he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy"* and then he goes on to the what: *"to be holy and blameless before him in love"*. Paul then turns to the why: *"He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ"*.



Being in a family has its benefits too. Paul next explains some of the benefits we receive when we are in God's family. By being adopted through Jesus Christ, we live into these promises:



- 1) *Redemption through his blood.*
- 2) *The forgiveness of our trespasses.*
- 3) *To know the mystery of his will.*

I cannot speak for you, but I am very grateful for these first two promises. How many of you are grateful for your redemption and the forgiveness of your sins? I certainly am. Then we come to that third one. Most of the time, it is good to live according to the good and pleasing and perfect will of God. But knowing God's will can also be challenging, especially when we must live out our faith within a community, with other imperfect and sinful human beings. As a family, we will have our times when we feel like yelling, hitting, judging, and so on. But Paul encourages us to choose a better way, to love above all else, to *"live for the praise of His glory"*— to live together in such a way that brings praise to God.



Think back to the video clip we saw earlier. Meredith so wanted to fit into Everett's family. She wanted to be accepted and welcomed. As a community of faith, we are called to live in peace and harmony, bringing praise to God in all we do and say - not to look good, but to be a family that leads others to want to be a part of our family. When Winner sees and observes Winner United Methodist Church and us as individuals, do they think, "Now that is a place I want to be a part of"? Do they sense a spirit of love and acceptance that says all are welcome here? If not, we have some work to do.

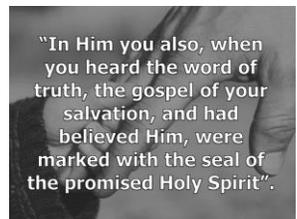
Friends, everyone wants to be a part of a family, to feel a sense of belonging. To illustrate what it feels like not to belong and then to find your home, please listen to this 40-year-old woman's story, as told by author Keith Miller:

*"When I was a tiny little girl, my parents died and I was put in an orphanage. I was not pretty at all and no one seemed to want me. But I longed to be adopted and loved by a family as far back as I can remember. I thought about it day and night, but everything I did seemed to go wrong. I must have tried too hard to please the people who came to look me over and what I did was to drive them away. But then one day the head of the orphanage told me that a family was coming to take me home with them. I was so excited that I jumped up and down and cried like a little baby. The matron reminded me that I was on trial and this might not be a permanent arrangement, but I just knew that somehow it would work out.*

*So, I went with this family and started to school. I was the happiest little girl you can imagine, and life began to open up for me just a little. But then one day a few months later, I skipped home from school and ran into the front door of the big old house we lived in. No one was at home, but in the middle of the front hall was my battered suitcase with my little coat thrown across it. As I stood there it suddenly dawned on me what it meant - I didn't belong there anymore."*

Miller reports that when the woman stopped speaking there was hardly a dry eye in the group. But then she cleared her throat and said almost matter-of-factly, *"This happened to me seven times before I was 13 years old. But wait, don't feel too badly. It was experiences like these that ultimately brought me to God - and there I found what I had always longed for - a place, a sense of belonging, a forever family."*

In our passage for today, Paul writes these words: *"In Him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in Him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit"*. In Him. In Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus that we believe. In Jesus we find the gospel of our salvation.



Through Jesus we are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Why? To *"live for the praise of His glory"*. As we close today, I invite you to think back to the story I just shared and to think of folks you know who are like the woman – longing to be adopted and loved by a family, longing to find a place to belong. After thinking that she had found her forever home, one day she found the suitcase in the hall and knew that she did not fit there either. Who do you know in your life

– perhaps a son or daughter, perhaps a brother or sister, perhaps a neighbor or a co-worker, perhaps the loner you see now and then – that does not seem to have anyplace to belong? She felt the sting of rejection – seven times in thirteen years. Who do you now that has felt the sting of rejection over and over?

Remember the end of the story. Choose to help others live out the end of the story. She found a community, a family to belong to. This woman came to understand that God loved her and that God’s family was the place that she *"had always longed for - a place, a sense of belonging, a forever family"*. As a part of this family of God, we have each received *"an inheritance"* once we *"set our hope on Christ"*. As the family of God, may we each choose to help others come to know this hope we profess, to find a place of welcome and acceptance, to find their “forever home”. Who do you know that needs to hear the word of truth, who needs to know the gospel of salvation, who needs to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, who needs to be marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit? May we reach them this week. May it be so this week for both you and for me. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) In what areas could you and our church grow to be more invitational and welcoming as a family of God for those who are not in the family?
- 2) Who do you know like the woman from the orphanage? Pray for God to guide you to help them find their “forever home”.
- 3) How can you pour into someone’s life – someone who has felt rejection and feels alone – so that they can grab hold of the promises of God?