WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SERMON

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Our Inheritance

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> *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. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 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, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 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; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14)*

I was thinking the other day about all the times in school I stayed home whenever I had a cold or the flu or something. Usually this began with me making a little nest on the couch, covered up in blankets. I would always watch Bob Barker on

the Price is Right, because that's good fun. To this day, whenever I hear that theme song, I get a little bit sniffly. But then after that would always come the Soap Operas. I don't know that I would ever choose to watch a soap opera on my own, but when I was home sick in the time before YouTube or on demand Netflix, if it was what was on, I would watch. I was always fascinated by the number of times characters on the show came down with amnesia! Someone would get bumped on the head or something like that, and completely forget everything. They'd forget who they loved. They'd forget what they did for a living. They'd forget their own address. They'd forget who they were.

Truth be told, it was a little bit scary! Can you imagine waking up and just…not knowing who you were? Actually, I think we do this more than we are aware of. We forget who we are. Paul is pointing right to this in the opening chapter of his letter to the Church in Ephesus.

Paul's Writing Style

This weekend, I was up at Pine Springs Camp leading worship for a crowd of mostly middle schoolers. And one of the many things I like about middle schoolers is that when they get excited, punctuation suddenly goes out the window. I think I saw a kid turn blue in the face because he was talking so fast that he forgot to breathe.

"OHMYGOSHITSCAMPWEEKENDANDWEGETTOWORSHIPWITHTHEROCKANDROLLBANDANDHAVEMARSHMALLOWSANDCAMPFIRESANDTHISISTHEBESTDAYEVER."

What is so fascinating is that this passage, everything we just read together, in the Greek language it's all one sentence. Paul is writing like he's an excited middle schooler. All eleven of those verses are just one sentence. You get the picture that Paul is just wandering, pacing back and forth, dictating to a scribe. He's excited about something, so what is it that he's excited about here?

God is the main actor.

Verse three starts with the word *eugeylatos*, or blessed. It's the same word we use for "eulogy," a combination of "eu" which means good, and "logos" which means word. A blessing is a good word.

God is blessed, says Paul, and God has chosen in all of that blessing to bless us. It kind of has this image of a cup overflowing, like God just can't help it. God contains so much goodness, it's overflowing to all of us.

It's also interesting that the word *blessed* can also mean *happy*. So often, we get this sense of God as an angry bearded dude in the sky who's just waiting for us to step out of line so that God can hurl down lightning bolts at us. But that's not the image

Paul is giving us for God here. God is blessed, and God is happy to pour out that blessing over us. God is happy with us.

So, what does that blessing look like?

Adopted.

If you want to see your pastor cry, throw on one of the many YouTube videos about adoption. I have seen so many of these where on Christmas, a child who has been with foster parents opens up a gift to discover the adoption paperwork, all filled out and signed. This will make your pastor cry because there's something beautiful about being welcomed into a family because they chose you. Especially when a child is like, 17, 18 years old, because by this point I'm guessing that the foster parents in question have seen all the warts that this child could possibly have. They've lived through temper tantrums and mood swings and teenage rebellion, and they decide to adopt anyway. It's quite beautiful.

This is what Paul says God is blessing each of us with. Ephesians 1:5 says *"He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will."*

Through Christ, we've been brought into the family. Through Christ, even though God has seen all the warts we come with, we've been brought into the family. Through Christ, even though God has seen our temper tantrums, we've been adopted. Through Christ, we belong to God, full stop.

And then, because this is all one run-on sentence, Paul repeats himself again.

Our inheritance

In verses 11 and 12, Paul writes that *"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, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory."*

I checked on Google, and it turns out that an inheritance is either a financial gain, or a title, that is transferred from one person to another upon their death. And so what Paul is pointing out here is that when Christ died, we obtained an inheritance. Not like, cash, or jewels, or a haunted house that we have to spend a night in before we can claim it…but actually what we inherit is Christ's title.

Where Jesus was God's Son, through his death, you and I have the ability to be called sons and daughters of God. We're in the family. We belong. That's the hope we come to carry.

And the best part is that it doesn't cost us anything. Browse through this verse again and again if you have time. What does Paul say is required of us to get this blessing? If we go to church enough, then we'll be adopted? If we become missionaries to a foreign land, then we'll have our inheritance? If we vote for the right people, then we'll have that belonging?

No. There are no commands here for us to follow. Just blessings for us to receive, just an identity to inherit, just an adopted reality to own. That's what Paul wants us to remember, and that's why he's excited enough to put it all in one long, drawn out sentence.

What happens when we forget?

What happens on those occasions where we become the soap opera star with amnesia about who God has called us to be? I've seen it plenty, and it's not exactly pretty.

For one thing, when we forget who God calls us to be, we forget that God is the principal actor in our story. We try to solve our problems by our own ability, or what little ability we may bring to the table. We start to think that our bank accounts will break us out of the prisons we've made for ourselves, forgetting that it's usually our bank accounts that make those prisons. We start to refuse the help of our beloved community, because we've convinced ourselves that if we don't solve our own problems, that we're somehow weak.
A friend once told me that the best sermons are the ones that you preach to yourself, and you're just happy if anyone else gets to hear it to. I know this is me. I don't know about you, but I know that when I forget who God has called me to be, that I tend to take matters into my own hands. And at least in my experience, doing so only makes it worse.

I need to remember here that God is the principle actor. God does the blessing. God does the adopting. God brings the inheritance. My job is to receive, and then to respond with gratitude.

When we forget who God has called us to be, we also have a tendency to beat ourselves up for our mistakes. When I was first learning how to play the drums, I think I made the same mistake that everyone makes, and my teacher had a unique analogy for it. When I was learning basic rudiments and simple songs, when I would make a mistake, I would just stop, kind of look up toward the heavens, and occasionally curse (which must have sounded funny coming out of a 10 year old's mouth…). My teacher said "If you were walking down the street, and you tripped over a crack in the sidewalk, would you just fall down and sit there for a while, or would you try to walk through it and catch yourself on the other side?" When you make a mistake, he was teaching me, you just keep playing.

But when we forget who we are, sometimes our mistakes can be just that paralyzing, can't they? When I say the unkind thing, I can get trapped in my own head. When I do something that hurts someone I love, I can beat myself up for days. When I choose a less than desirable path, I can become my own worse critic.

All of this betrays our identity as the adopted beloved of God. I mean, just listen to it again: *In him we have redemption through*

his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. (Ephesians 1:7) We already have it. It's not that we'll have it if we life a perfect life, we have it here and now. Why on earth would we allow our mistakes to hold us back? Why on earth wouldn't we accept that grace? Our job is to receive that grace, and then respond to God with gratitude.

And, when we forget who we are, we have a tendency to forget how to forgive others. One of my least favorite sentences is sadly one that I hear way too often. "I could never forgive them for…" I have heard all kinds of variations of it. "I could never forgive them for rooting for the Patriots." "I could never forgive them for spreading gossip about me." "I could never forgive them for being late to my wedding." "I could never forgive them for that betrayal."

What I think so often lies at the heart of that sentence is us forgetting who we are, and who our neighbors are too. We're working on a series on forgiveness coming up a bit later down the line, but as just a brief spoiler for that: When we forgive someone, we usually come to find out that it's us that we've set free. Anne Lamott said that refusing to forgive someone is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the other person to die. To which we might ask, how's that working out for you?

When we forget, we can get all kinds of sideways on forgiving others. We are forgiven, but when we forget that we tend to not be able to forgive others. We have been given grace, but when we forget we withhold that grace from our friends. We

have been adopted, but when we forget we tend to choose sibling rivalry.

How can we remember?

For starters, we have the community of the saints. When I go down to Penguins games now, and I'm going to meet someone, I always tell them the same thing: Meet me at Mario. For those who haven't been there, there's an incredible statue of Mario Lemieux, bursting through two defenders on his way to score one of his iconic goals. And I love that statue for at least two reasons: First is that the two guys that he beat that night are also immortalized in bronze, and that's kind of funny to me. But second, it's a reminder of the greatness of that player. We built a monument to him so that we would never forget what he did for the sport and for our city.

Look at how Eugene Peterson paraphrases Psalm 148 in the message: *Let them praise the name of GOD—it's the only Name worth praising. His radiance exceeds anything in earth and sky; he's built a monument—his very own people!*

Did you catch that? God's very own people are a monument to who God has created us to be. So, we remind each other who we are. On the days where I am having spiritual amnesia, I hope that you can remind me that I'm adopted. On the days where our mistakes are catching up to us hard, I hope that we can be a monument to our inheritance. When I am moving

forward after a difficult season, I hope that this community can speak our adopted status over each other.

May you…

May you not suffer from spiritual amnesia! Instead, may you remember that you are adopted by Christ, welcomed in to the family even with your warts and scars showing. May you deeply enjoy the inheritance we have in Christ, beloved Sons and Daughters of God. And may we continue as a church to be a monument to God…God's very people, showing God's radiance exceeding anything in earth and sky. Amen.



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