

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

A woman and her grandmother—who was a very forgiving and religious soul--were sitting on their porch discussing a member of the family. The young woman said, "He's just no good, He's completely untrustworthy, and not to mention he's lazy."

"Yes, he's bad," the grandmother said as she rocked back and forth in her rocker, "but Jesus loves him."

"I'm not so sure of that," the younger woman persisted.

"Oh, yes," assured the elderly lady. "Jesus loves him."

She rocked and thought for a few more minutes and then added, "Of course, Jesus doesn't know him like we do."<sup>1</sup>

This morning we begin a seven week journey through Ephesians. In this series, we will use the Epistle readings from the Revised Common Lectionary as our guide. You'll find the scriptures and the sermon topics listed in the newsletter, on our Facebook page and on our website at [mcfarlandumc.org](http://mcfarlandumc.org). I want to urge you to follow along as you are able to do so. My suggestion on the best way to do this would be to read through the epistle in it's entirety using a modern transliteration (thought for thought) like The Message, if you have it (you can find it online at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com)) in order to get the basic idea. Set it aside for a bit then read through it again using a modern word for word translation like the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the Common English Bible (CEB) or the New International Version (NIV). As much as I love the old English of the Seventeenth Century in the King James, I would not suggest it for study for

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<sup>1</sup> [www.sermons.com](http://www.sermons.com). Illustrations for the 7th Sunday after Pentecost. Accessed 7/10/2021.

many reasons, the primary reason being that language changes through the years and our English language has changed tremendously since the early 1600's. There is also the issue of better and earlier source documents for translation that were not available to the translators in the time of King James. Those source documents are essential because the Bible was written mostly in Hebrew in the Old Testament and Greek in the New Testament. None of it was written in English so it has all had to be translated.

The bottom line is pick a translation or a couple of translations that you feel comfortable with and you will be fine.

As we begin this trip through Ephesians, there are a couple of things to point out:

1) There is some disagreement among scholars that this letter was written by Paul himself. It was common in that time period for students of a teacher to write in the name of that teacher, so the thought that this isn't a letter directly from Paul is not a problem. The evidence is that this letter doesn't quite follow the style and grammar of the letters that we know were written by Paul. However, that being said, when I refer to the author of this text, I will call him Paul.

2) The other thing to note is that this letter was probably not written to the church in Ephesus. For one thing, the earliest source documents that scholars have access to omit the phrase "in Ephesus" at the end of verse one, the only place in the letter that we see this indication. Another hint is that the letter does not point out areas of conflict in the local church like the other letters do. So, the thought is that this letter was one that was intended to be circulated among all of the churches in Asia Minor, that it was a general epistle with universal truths that were common to all of the churches in that area.

Regardless, these issues do not lessen the importance and impact of this letter upon our understanding of what God was trying to accomplish through Christ and his work. And they do not lessen the necessity for us to take

seriously our study of the Bible. It is my hope that this series on Ephesians and the follow up study of James that will take us through to the end of September will keep us focused on what is very important on the road to Discipleship.

The first part of this letter, Chapters 1-3, deal with issues of theology, issues of God's character, our understanding of that character, and it introduces us to the *mystery* of God and God's plan for us. These first 3 chapters deal with the question *why*? The last part of the letter deal with the question *how*: how do we live into the obligation that we take on as followers of the living and resurrected Christ.

Now, why don't we get right to it?

*Bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing that comes from heaven. God chose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in God's presence before the creation of the world. God destined us to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ because of his love. This was according to his goodwill and plan and to honor his glorious grace that he has given to us freely through the Son whom he loves.<sup>2</sup>*

Wow!

Out of the gate we are slapped in the face with the Good News from the very beginning. Just like the Grandmother said in my opening illustration, God loves us... all of us, but unlike what the Grandmother said, God knows us intimately... and loves us anyway. More than that, God has *blessed* us with every spiritual blessing. God *chose* us even before the creation of the world, and God *destined* us to be God's *adopted* children through Jesus Christ. Why? Because of God's love for God's creation.

Now, I'll be the first person to admit that I don't have any experience with adoption. But I have friends who have adopted children, friends who have been adopted, and friends who served as foster parents for children in need of adoption. It is a very special thing that blesses both the child and the parent. However, this adoption into the family of God for *all people* is not something that is to be contained in the walls of the church and celebrated only among those

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<sup>2</sup> Common English Bible (2011). (Eph 1:3-6). Nashville, TN: Common English Bible

who are gathered. It is to be celebrated throughout the whole world, celebrated throughout the entirety of the earth itself, that ALL PEOPLE... all people... have been adopted into the family of God and that we are to share that celebration excitement with everyone in whom we come into contact.

This isn't something that is private. This isn't something that should not be shared. This is a celebration of adoption that the whole world is invited to... is welcome to as we are all part of the family of God.

Not only are we a part of the family of God, we share in the inheritance that comes from being in that family. That inheritance, among other things, ensures that we are forgiven of our sin.

This past week, a friend of mine mentioned an old friend of his, now deceased, who shared in an apartment when they were studying at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta back in the 1960's. George and Harry were the Methodists and Otto came from a Nazarene background. Otto declared that as a Nazarene, he was sanctified and was immune to willful sin. As you can imagine, it didn't take long for George and Harry to tire of Otto's sanctimony. So they devised a plan. As George wrote, "Finally Harry and I had had enough of his sanctimony, so we put him up to a challenge to prove him wrong. We created him an 'Otto's Sin Chart' on poster board and put it on the wall in our common room. Every time Otto said a cross word to one of us, every time he tried to cheat in Rook, every time we caught him fibbing or exaggerating, we marked him up with the sin, the date and the time on his daily chart. Hardly a day went by that he didn't get marked up for something. At the end of the month Harry and I had him convinced he wasn't quite as sanctified as he thought! (I'm sure he thought who needs enemies when he had friends like us!) All for the sake of keeping each other humble... "

"Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble, when you're prefect in every way?"  
Anyone?

We all sin. We all fall short of the glory of God. Yet, God doesn't hold that against us. God forgives us. God doesn't condemn us.

As we state every time that we share in Holy Communion as a paraphrase of Romans 5:8, “God proves his love toward us. Because, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

God gave up EVERYTHING for us so that the relationship with humankind that was sullied at the time of the fall as described in Genesis could be restored. It’s like we were rebelling and God just grabbed us into a bear hug while we were still fighting. And then God just holds on until we are tired of fighting and we give in to the comfort of forgiveness and acceptance.

The Good News is that no matter how much we screw up, no matter how hard we fight, no matter how hard we complain, God NEVER gives up on us, even if we give up on God.

That is the Good News. And it is truly Good News. We may not be ready to hear it. But God is always ready to share it. Our problem is that we are the ones usually standing in the way.

As the old song reminds us, “Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness... On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.”

God’s arms are open to us. God is ready to welcome us if we just get over our stubbornness. And God welcomes us anyway... unconditionally forgives us of our transgressions and seeks to make us whole. If we just accept the gift that God offers us.

And that gift is salvation.

It doesn’t depend upon us.

It totally depends upon God.

Thanks be to God.

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