

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
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The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10)  
July 12, 2009  
Ephesians 1:3-14

*"Chosen in Christ"*

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Text:

<sup>3</sup>Praise be  
to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us in the heavenly realms  
with every spiritual blessing  
**in Christ**  
<sup>4</sup>for he chose us **in him** before the creation of the world  
to be holy and blameless in his sight in love  
<sup>5</sup>he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ,  
in accordance with his pleasure and will  
<sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace,  
  
which he has freely given us  
**in the One he loves--**  
<sup>7</sup>**in him** we have  
redemption through his blood,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
in accordance with the riches of God's grace  
<sup>8</sup>that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding  
<sup>9</sup>and he made known to us the mystery of his will  
according to his good pleasure, which he purposed **in Christ**,  
<sup>10</sup>to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment  
--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together  
under one head, even Christ  
<sup>11</sup>**in him** we were also chosen,  
having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out  
everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,  
<sup>12</sup>in order that we, who were the first to hope **in Christ**,  
might be for the praise of his glory  
  
<sup>13</sup>And you also were included **in Christ**  
when you heard the word of truth,  
the gospel of your salvation.  
Having believed,  
you were marked **in him** with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,  
<sup>14</sup>who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance  
until the redemption of those who are God's possession  
--to the praise of his glory.

## Introduction

I would like to begin this sermon by sharing a little secret with you. It is a secret that other pastors have shared with me and I with them. Because each week there are normally three Scripture readings to choose from, the normal procedure is to pick the easiest of the three to preach on. At first glance, it does not appear that I have done that today. Indeed, the exact opposite is the case. The Old Testament reading relates the call of the prophet Amos who spoke against the northern kingdom of Israel and their king, Jeroboam. The Gospel for today relates the result of the powerful preaching of John the Baptist against Herod and his sinful lifestyle in taking his brother's wife to himself. John the Baptist literally loses his head for his preaching. Now that might be considered a difficult text. But the Epistle lesson for this day would be avoided scrupulously by many preachers because it talks about predestination. It is very complicated. But it is also very powerful and has a great message of comfort for all who would take the time to study it. So we take the difficult path this day, but it is also the path filled with possibilities in the understanding of our faith and the grace of God. Our theme is echoed several times in these verses of St. Paul to the Ephesians and it is this: "Chosen in Christ!" May the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless this word today.

### I. Praise--to the Holy Trinity

The words of Ephesians 1:3-14 are words of praise. They are a doxology--a word of glory or blessing. The very first word in the Greek text ("eulogia") is the word for blessing or praise as it is translated in our version today. And it is the very first word of a very long sentence. For in the original Greek language in which the apostle wrote these words the sentence does not end until the closing words of verse 14--"to the praise of his glory." Please take if you will the copy of the text as it is printed for you at the beginning of this sermon and look at it with me for a moment. (Those of you listening on the radio--if you wish to have copy of this page, just request a copy from the church office) This form captures the phrases and format of the Greek text. Indeed it shows that these verses are very intricately connected. An English teacher or someone teaching elementary composition would be appalled at a sentence like this. For us a run-on sentence can show inattentiveness or sloppiness in speech. Here, this lengthy sentence shows careful thought and planning. One could truthfully say, it shows the inspiration of God. Each part has a different emphasis, yet each is also connected with the other.

Note that there are three sections to this "sentence." Each concludes with the phrase "to the praise of his glory" in some way or other. The copy you have before you is divided up in those three sections. If we see three sections, we should think of the Holy Trinity. Indeed, this lesson is very Trinitarian. Note it starts "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is God the Father who chose us. God the Father who adopts us. God the Father who blesses us.

The second section is quite predictable therefore. For it speaks of Him who redeems us through his blood and in whom is the forgiveness of sins. In him is the mystery that will be made known when the times reach their fulfillment. In him all things must find their one

head. This section is clearly about the work of our Savior Jesus Christ.

If that is the case, then we should not be surprised to find reference to the Holy Spirit in the third section. We do not have to look very far. "You were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." The third section is full of the language of the means of grace, the very proper work of the Spirit. For it speaks of the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation, the power of God. And so in this complicated and long single sentence we have a clear reference to the Blessed and Holy Trinity.

## II. For Us--A Blessing

Yet as these words are lofty in their presentation of the mysteries of God, they are also very personal. They are about us as much as they are about our Triune God. They are a purposeful reminder of the blessings which are ours. For the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has "blessed us in the heavenly places with every spiritual blessing in Christ" as the opening verse of this text shows us.

Do you feel blessed by the Lord? Our children and you as well know that a proper response to the question "How are you today" is "Blessed by the Lord." But it is still probably a question and answer that requires some thought on our part. Sometimes in our lives we feel anything but blessed. There are sicknesses and hardships of so many kinds. Pressures and troubles surround us. I have visited in the last weeks a group of our members hospitalized with strokes and hip fractures and knee replacements. We continue to pray for Pastor Struve as he seeks the counsel of doctors about the proper course of action to take regarding his continued pain. All of us can come up with a list of our own troubles and trials. But that is when we need to remember that we are chosen in Christ. For the Lord loved us so much that he chose us before the foundation of the world. He called us to be his own. He makes us his "saints" as this Epistle begins by the work of his grace for the praise of His glory.

In that call of God we see the purpose for our worship, the purpose for our life, the purpose for eternity. Last week I was a little astounded once again by the outpouring of emotion at the memorial service for Michael Jackson and the words of praise and glorification that were used to describe someone whose life was tragic and more than a little troubled. Many of those same people would have little or no excitement for the things we talk about today. But these things are the things of eternity. They are about a glory that is beyond expression, a glory that will never fade away. Indeed in those things we are blessed as the people of God for we are his own. We are chosen in Christ.

## III. In Christ

And now I would ask you to look again at the printed out version of the words of the Epistle for today. Please note the words printed in bold. They are all very similar words: "In Christ", "In Him", "in the One He loves" They all refer to the same person. We said before that this text is very Trinitarian. It is also very personal. And finally, it is also very Christocentric.

That is the technical word to indicate that this text is centered in Jesus Christ our Lord. If you count the phrases that are in bold type, you will find nine of them there. Actually that is one short of the ten which occur in the Greek text. If we were to take the closing words of v.10 "even Christ" and then translate them literally as they are "even in Christ" then we could make those words bold as well. There are ten references to Christ in this text.

Ten was the rhetorical number of completeness. Ten times, St. Paul speaks of Jesus Christ in this text. The Lord literally is woven into this complex sentence, this hymn of praise from beginning to end. The Lord Jesus Christ is certainly central here.

In our day and age you hear much talk about how similar the religions of the world all are. Scholars and people expound eloquently about the thoughts and themes and ethics and works of the different religions and what they share. I suppose in comparing Christianity with other religions that works very well indeed as long as you leave just one thing out--the Lord Jesus Christ. What would you have left of this text today if you remove Jesus Christ? Not much but a bunch of unconnected thoughts. What is left of the Christian faith if you remove Jesus Christ? Nothing at all.

But Christ Jesus is the very center and hope and assurance for what we are and believe as His beloved children. We are God's adopted sons through Jesus Christ. We are his own--to the praise of His glory. That is predestination. God chooses us in love by grace in Jesus Christ our Savior.

### Conclusion

That is the ultimate comfort and powerful confession of this complex, detailed, and beautiful word. We are the Lord's. He has called us and chosen us. His word, the word of the Gospel, the powerful means of grace in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Lord's supper makes us His own. And nothing, nothing can separate us from His love, his grace in His Son.

As we sang before:

Hence all fear and sadness,  
For the Lord of gladness,  
Jesus, enters in.  
Those who love the Father,  
Though the storms may gather  
Still have peace within.  
Yea, whate'er I here must bear  
Thou art still my purest pleasure  
Jesus, priceless Treasure!

In His Name. Amen.