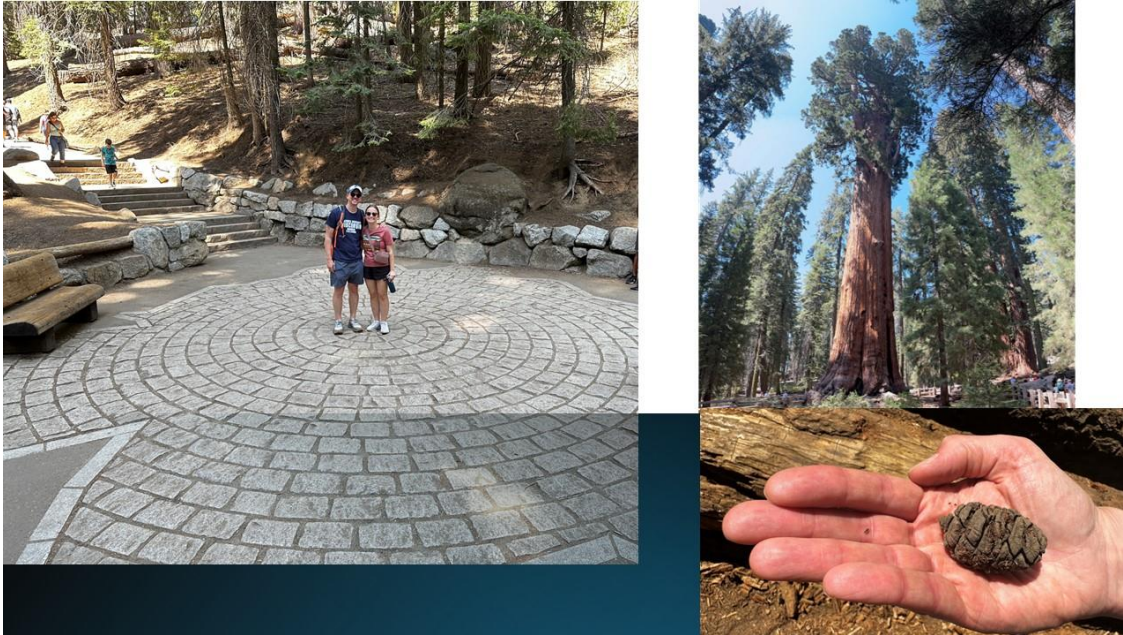


Monday, August 19, 2024

Read Ephesians 1:1-6

### Before the Foundation of the World

“(the Father) chose in (Christ) before the foundation of the world” Ephesians 1:4



The tree pictured above is the General Sherman Tree in Sequoia National Park - the largest tree in the world. Abigail and I are standing in the middle of the outline of the tree's footprint. And although giant sequoia trees begin from a pine cone that would fit in your palm, after more than 2,000 years, the footprint of this tree is more than 36 feet in diameter.

The General Sherman tree is huge and reminds those who visit how extraordinarily immense God's creation truly is. Yet what truly was mind-blowing to me is that long before that seed ever went into the ground, before Christ walked the dust of the earth, in fact before the dust of the earth was spoken into being – God chose us in Christ. Not from the foundation of this enormous tree, but long before, at the foundation of Creation, our God wanted us to belong to Him, and decided beforehand to adopt us into His family through Christ, God's Son from all eternity.

This is a great mystery. But Paul isn't concerned with explaining it all (as though we could grasp completely the mind and workings of God that extend far before and beyond our lives). I can't wrap my mind around a tree living for more than 2,000 years.

Yet how much more breathtaking it is to consider that God, before the creation of the world, chose believers to be His own and the heirs of eternal life. Rather than trying to explain how this is so, Paul invites us to look up beyond the heights and rejoice in the incredible love of God that was exemplified 2,000 years ago upon the gory, yet glorious tree on Calvary, but also extends to the heart of God in eternity.

While we can only get a glimpse of the enormity of such love, we cry out with Paul: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” Amen. (Eph. 1:3, 5-6)

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason*

Tuesday, August 20, 2024

Read Ephesians 1:7-10

### I am Not Alone

There are times when I think that I am all alone in the world. How lonely it is, and how frightening. I know that my Savior loves me, and I know that I am guarded by Him, but it is scary out there. I remember Peter walking on the water. He was alone doing what was obviously impossible. That's what I am feeling like.

But know that I am not really alone. No one could be alone who is in God! But when my attention is on the world and my ability to handle it all - well, I become aware of my fragility and helplessness. And all that is wasted concern, typical error.

I.AM.NOT.ALONE!

God came Himself - to rescue me. It's true that He came for others as well, but He came for me. He would have come if it were only me! He planned it all, guided it through the world, and permitted the devil to attack His plans, all without failing to keep and provide for His people. Though they didn't understand all that He was doing, He cradled them in His arms as He patiently waited for the right time to exhibit His truth and care in Jesus. And that Jesus accepts His suffering and death and RESURRECTION for me. And He lives with me and in me also. Now the world can't overwhelm me, since He came this far for me. Now when I see the danger of the world, I realize that I am observing evidence of His care for me - since I am living through them.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for what You have done for me, but even more today for what You are doing for me now. Keep me looking at YOU. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad*

Wednesday, August 21, 2024

Read Ephesians 1:11-14

### **Sealed With The Promised Holy Spirit**

*“In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”*

Ephesians 1:13

Paul says that in Christ, we have been appointed by God’s lot and predestined according to the One, Jesus Christ, who works and accomplishes all things according to the purpose and eternal plan of God’s will. We have been appointed God’s lot in Christ and **“obtained an inheritance”** (v. 11) not by our will or plan but by God's plan, purpose, and will in Christ for redemption and salvation from sin and everlasting death. That is, so we, the church, would be the praise of God the Father’s glory who are hoping in Christ’s redeeming work—to the Jew and Gentile Christians. We can trust that God is at work in all things and that our salvation is accomplished completely by God’s grace in Christ. This is Gospel Truth to be assured by God’s promise in Christ and having been sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Paul says that in Christ, having **“heard the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation [having] believed in Him, [you] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance”** (vv. 13-14) for the redemption of The Holy Triune God’s possession of the praise of His glory. This, again, is Gospel Truth for you through faith and the promised Holy Spirit you received in your Baptism!

Francis Pieper called attention to the Gospel in the proper sense, *“The term ‘Gospel’ is used in its proper sense in Holy Writ when it refers to what does not call for works, but for faith (Rom. 1:16–17), hence does not condemn sinners, but assures them of grace (Acts 20:24), peace (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15), and salvation (Eph. 1:13)”* (Christian Dogmatics, 222).

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You are the Redeemer and Lord of all mankind. Stir up our hearts and minds always with Gospel Truth, that we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch*

Thursday, August 22, 2024  
Read: Ephesians 1:15-17

### Something To Be Thankful For

To begin the meat of his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul gives thanks.

Now, this may not be surprising because we have a lot of things to be thankful for. We live in a country that offers the freedom to practice our faith openly without fear. We have a beautiful building where we can meet and worship Jesus together every Sunday. We have food to eat, homes to live in, and family and friends to spend time with. These are all gifts from God – undeserved, unearned, freely given. We truly have a lot to be thankful for. Paul surely had a lot to be thankful for, too. He was a well-educated man with an impressive social status. He was an apostle, accepted and loved by the other men and women who followed Jesus. He was a successful businessman who operated a tent-building business that made enough money for him to live on and even travel occasionally. Like us, Paul had a lot to be thankful for.

But what is surprising is that these things aren't what Paul is expressing thanks for here in our Ephesians passage. Instead, Paul says that he is giving thanks because "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints..." Paul is giving thanks for something more valuable – more important – than earthly pleasures and comforts: faith. Paul gives thanks for the faith that God has given to him and for the faith that He has given to the Christians in Ephesus.

Sometimes it can be easy for us to take our faith for granted. We have been born again, renewed and restored to a good relationship with God our Father through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have been baptized into His family and given new and eternal life. And sometimes, we can get so comfortable and accustomed to this new life that we forget how beautiful and radically unique it is.

So, try to be a little like Paul today and everyday moving forward. Give thanks to God ceaselessly for the faith that He has given you. Give thanks to God for the faith that He continues to give to the people around you that you listen to and interact with. And then, pray that He might enable you to live your life with all of the advantages that come with being a claimed child of God.

Prayer: Jesus, I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in you, my Lord, or come to you; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. Thank you. Amen.

- *Luther's Small Catechism*, explanation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Article of the Creed.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown*

Friday, August 23, 2024  
Read Ephesians 1:18-23

### All Things Under His Feet

I think that people sometimes wonder where Christ could be when they see the world and all of its problems. I think that sometimes we see the news with wars, crime, and natural disasters and we wonder what God could possibly be doing? We probably feel the same way when we look at our own lives and see difficulties of all kinds. In light of these things there is a temptation to wonder where Christ could possibly be? What could He be doing instead of returning and saving us? While I want very much for Christ to come back this instant, I think that this text helps us to remember where Christ is and what He is doing. Paul tells us here in Ephesians that God has seated Christ at His right hand in Heaven. Christ is ruling with the Father and He will continue to do so until His return. When we are faced with hard things either in the world or in our own lives, we can take some comfort in knowing that even though Christ hasn't returned yet we are still in His hands even now. Christ is ruling over all of creation because all things have been put under His feet and more than that He is serving as the head of His church which means that we are even more closely linked to Him. We aren't only part of His creation, but we are part of His body, so we can trust Him not only as the ruler of all but also as our head. When we see and experience hard things we can always be confident that Christ is where He always is and He's doing what He always does which is ruling and caring for everything that is His which includes you.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for caring for us as parts of your creation and parts of your body. Be with us as we go about our lives and help us to trust that You are seated on Your throne and ruling all things for our good. In Your name we pray. Amen.

*Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson*

Saturday, August 24, 2024

Read Ephesians 2:1-5

### “Rich in Mercy”

Life was easy, before. Before it happened, I just drifted through each day, walking in the ways I was told. When lost, others around me steered me back onto the path. I listened to what my body told me, I trusted completely in the thoughts my mind informed me of. Anger and wrath were my friends, and the “prince of the power of the air” drove me on, along with the rest of mankind. Before.

Before, even though I didn’t know it at the time, I was dead. I was cold, limp, and lifeless, but wasn’t even aware of it. My fellow “sons of disobedience” made me feel alive. The passions of the flesh put a false breath in my lungs. Before.

Before; I was dead, alone, in the dark. I was lost, blind, and unaware of my condition. Being dead, if I wanted to heal myself – I couldn’t. When you’re dead, you can’t give yourself life. My sins and trespasses numbed me, made me think that I was living. I busied myself in following the course of the world, living in disobedience. But not actually living. Before.

Then, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.” You don’t see that on anyone’s tombstone – “He was rich in mercy”. None of the presidential candidates is running on a platform of “Mercy”. Taylor Swift (probably, I don’t really know) hasn’t written a hit song about “Mercy”.

But God, full of love for His Creation, loves us despite our condition and has had mercy on us. We were dead in our trespasses – lost, helpless, and lifeless – but He made us alive together with Christ. Just as Jesus was made dead by our sins but rose to life and glory, we have died to our sin and rose in the waters of baptism to our eternal life with Him. The Words spoken into us when that water touched us were empowered by Jesus’ Spirit to enliven our bodies.

Mercy: “to have compassion”. God’s love was so strong for His people that He became incarnate in His Son. Jesus wore our flesh and became one of us in order to have perfect compassion for us. No other god in the world knows us like Jesus. And Jesus knows our very hearts and souls and has become the embodiment of God’s mercy for us. His passion for us saved us.

Rich in mercy. On Monday, “Grace”!

We pray: Merciful God, thank you for enlivening me by Your Spirit and Your Son’s blood. Strengthen me to show Your mercy to others. Amen.

*Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson*