

WELCOME 12th January 2025 – 1 Epiphany '25 C

Ephesians 1:3-14

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have in your hands & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link is on website...restart 17th Jan

As we move into this week When we were in Canberra last week we went to **the** Pompeii exhibit @ the Nat'l Museum...we know the story...Beautiful thriving city wiped out in an instant when Mt Vesuvius suddenly became a very active erupting volcano. It was another reminder that the winds of change can blow in an instant...& are sometimes a cyclone of ruin/desolation. We know that story too...50 yrs since Cyclone Tracy...20 yrs since Boxing Day Tsunami...a stumble, a persistent headache, a moment's inattention & the winds of change blow us right off our feet.

But in that world...where brokenness competes w/ beauty & horror strives against hope **WE** have a firm place to stand...**WE** have a fixed beacon to guide us...& **WE** have a certain destiny for our lives.

Even before he made the world, God loved us & chose us in Christ
to be holy & without fault in his eyes.

God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family
by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.

This is what he wanted to do, & it gave him great pleasure. - Eph. 1:3-5

Whatever blows your way in the year ahead...God is still w/ us. Christ is still at work w/in us. The Spirit still speaks to us & is powerful through us. **You** bear the name that is above every name so that **in you** his image, his presence, his purpose & his rule of grace & love can be experienced by everyone around you.

God chose you in Christ. He stands in you as you stand before the world.

Let's pray...and then explore & experience that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, you spoke your word, it became flesh & lived with us & we experienced your good news in Jesus Christ. Fill all creation with that word again, so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations and singing of your glorious hope to all people, we may become one living body, your living and life-giving presence on the earth. Through Christ we pray...Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What is one of your many God-given blessings for which you are particularly thankful today? (*I'll assume "I'm alive" so name something else*)
2. If you were asked to identify yourself, what forms of identity do you possess? Which of your identifiers is most important to you? Why?
(*How many different "identities" can you point to?
Which one is most important to you?*)

1 EPIPHANY '25 C – WINDS OF CHANGE: STAND IN THE SON

On the morning of Sept 20, 1931, three English professors strolled along Addison's Walk @ Magdalen College, Oxford. You've heard 2 of the names ^{b/4}: **CS** Lewis, who later wrote The Chronicles of Narnia & a vast array of other Xn literature... His good friend, **JRR** Tolkien, who would go on to author The Lord of the Rings & Hugo Dyson, Tutor/Lecturer at Reading University don't know anything else about him other than he was part of a group of writers & scholars & friends that included Lewis & Tolkien & called themselves "The Inklings." British humour?

As they walked, they talked about life, love & friendship. Lewis, an atheist at that time, believed religious stories like Christmas were human inventions, similar to pagan myths. Tolkien, a Xn, offered a different view...All other human stories, he said, reveal longings that are fulfilled in the true story of Jesus. These stories, Tolkien suggested, were "good dreams" sent by God to prepare humanity for the true story of Christ. The Gospel fulfils the deep longings expressed in all these other stories. All other stories point toward & find their ultimate meaning in Christ's story. Jesus's story is the actual object, while other stories are mere reflections in mirrors/longings that call us toward what was lost in the Garden...that severed relationship ^{w/} God still aches in all of us. We long for what we've lost & tell stories that give us hope of restoration...restoration that only comes in Christ. Similar themes appear in stories from different cultures & times because they all reflect the ultimate longing of our hearts for wholeness & the ultimate truth & redemption found **in** Christ crucified.

Lewis would later recount that just 8 days after this conversation ^{w/} Dyson & Tolkien, he fully submitted himself to Christ's rule & his truth over all other. The key insight that changed the life of CS Lewis: every great story points to a deeper, more significant story. Themes like sacrifice, renewal, & love overcoming death recur in human history & storytelling because they reflect the greatest story ever told: the true story of Jesus. His story isn't just another beautiful myth; it's the historical reality **TOWARD WHICH** all other stories point & **FOR WHICH** all hearts long. I would go one step farther...**the** promise of restoration of all things by sacrificial love in Jesus Christ is in fact woven into the fabric of Creation: How can I say that?

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The promise of restoration of all things by sacrificial love in Jesus Christ is in fact woven into the fabric of Creation...it precedes Creation...Even ^{b/4} he made the world...

That should blow your socks off...This is not abstract airy-fairy theological hair-splitting & navel-gazing...Paul says the fundamental reality behind ALL reality...the essential truth sustaining ALL truth is...**God** loved us & chose us in Christ...God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. If that right there doesn't raise your heart rate & put your blood pressure above the red line you may already be dead. ^{b/4} **he made the world** God **HAD ALREADY** loved, chosen & decided to adopt you/me in Jesus Christ by **HIS** crucifixion, resurrection, & rule over all things. ^{b/4} **time began.** ^{b/4} **human existence.** ^{b/4} **human rebellion.** ^{b/4} **anything else** God **HAD ALREADY** purposed to repair the damage done by sin, & to restore his original intention for humanity: to create a people for himself who are conformed to the likeness of his Son...Even more: God actually chose **us** to be adopted as his children. His purpose has always been to bring the people he created (pinnacle of his handiwork) into a personal relationship ^{w/} himself through Jesus Christ. Not only do we get to enjoy a relationship ^{w/} God, but we can also delight in all the benefits that come from being a member of his family.

I don't know if I've mentioned this ^{b/4} about these 1st 14 vss of Eph 1...but in the OGK it's **ALL 1 SENTENCE**. But even more...God is the subject of almost all the verbs. God the Father is Prime Mover...Lead Actor. **EVERYTHING** follows from *God loved, chose & decided in/through Jesus Christ*. That should plant 2 things deep in our hearts: 1 – Humility...We can't take any credit for being restored to a relationship ^{w/} the Father as a dearly loved child. **WE** didn't have anything to do ^{w/} it. Paul would later write: **Once** you were **dead** because of your disobedience & sin...But God is so rich in mercy, & he loved us so much, that even though we were **dead** because of our sin, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) – Eph 2:1 & 4 Dead people can do nothing to effect being alive. But God gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. When Jesus died & was raised on the 3rd day he knew you by name. In fact when he raised Lazarus, the widow of Nain's son & Jairus' daughter he was giving the world advance notice of what would one day come to the rest of us...only then it will last forever. And we remember relive & rehearse that resurrection every time we walk to this table...or one just like it...

2 – Assurance/Confidence...If I have somehow chosen, decided, or been good enough to deserve my status as God's child...then it is **ALWAYS** at risk. If I was good enough to get in can I be bad enough to get tossed out? Did I really mean it when I decided chose or prayed the sinner's prayer? I know folks who've been baptized as many as 6 times because they were never sure it took the last time? They kept wanting to nail down that which wasn't loose in the first place. Martin Luther was the worst & fretting his perpetual slide into this or that "sin" until he was finally seized by

that last phrase in Eph 2:4, that's repeated in 2:8-9...(It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For by grace you have been saved through faith, & this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

NB: Every act of rebellion, every wayward thought, every God-dishonoring moment of your life is swept up in the Father's desire to save & recreate you in the image of Jesus the Son & unleash in you the power of the Holy Spirit. Despite whatever mess you think you are & the rest of us might agree... God says, "No, I love him. I love her. I'm going to rescue them & make them mine. I'm going to make them perfectly like my Son." God himself in Jesus puts on flesh & blood empties himself of every heavenly privilege to come die as a slave to seek & save the lost & make us his very own & bring us home to God & give us his kingdom...to be receivers/bearers of God's deep/unshakeable love. God delights in you & invites you to delight in him because God wants to fill your life w/ his presence & his abundance.

And what God HAD ALREADY purposed Christ accomplished. "**It is finished**" means just that. There is nothing to be added to what is already done in & through Jesus Christ crucified, risen & reigning over all things. **So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness & grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son & forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom & understanding.** Jesus comes to redeem/heal our broken human existence by 1st taking us w/ him into the eternal merciful forgiving restoring presence of God & 2nd uniting us to & raising us to life in the wisdom & power of God now & forever. Don't forget...**"...when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death...For we died & were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was."** - Rom 6:3-5

You are through baptism united w/ Jesus. Your sin has been absorbed by Christ. Your sinful selves crucified & buried w/ Christ. You have been raised again by the glory of the Father, just as Christ was. You are truly called "child of God" & given a status like Christ because of him. All these are the full effect of your baptism which finds its foundation in the baptism life death & rez of Jesus so that the world might be saved through him. Over & over again in these verses Paul repeats the assurance: **all** the blessings of God for us are found in Christ...through...united w/... under the authority of...w/ the blood of...Why? Because apart from Christ there is nothing...

But it gets better! God's ultimate intention is to **"bring everything together under the authority of Christ — everything in heaven & on earth."** At some point all creation will see that Jesus Christ is the main point of all history. God has chosen Christ as the one

in whom he will restore harmony to the universe. Jesus Christ is the axis upon which the entire universe moves. Everything sin broke, distorted, or twisted...everything that is currently dislocated, everything that needs reconciliation & restoration will be restored to harmony in Jesus Christ. **"Every knee will bow & tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."** - Php 2:10-11

What God HAD ALREADY purposed Christ accomplished & the Spirit supplies...I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me w/ His gifts, set me apart for God's purposes & kept me in true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, & sets apart for God the whole Christian church on earth, & keeps it united w/ Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this church He daily & richly forgives my sins & those of all who believe. On the Last Day He will raise me & all the dead, & give eternal life to me & all who trust in Christ. **When you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised & that he has purchased us to be his own people.** What God purposed Christ accomplished & the Spirit supplies Always remember...in this world...where brokenness competes w/ beauty & horror strives against hope we have a firm place to stand...a fixed beacon to guide...& a certain destiny for our lives.

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TAKE IT HOME - As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

Where in the week ahead do you want your life & witness to Jesus to "praise & glorify him"? (everywhere doesn't count...be specific...where/with whom do you want your being chosen loved, forgiven, adopted to be most obvious so God gets the honour?)

Let's pray with that in mind... Lord Jesus, help us to see you at work all around us & to experience your Spirit working within us. Open us to those moments when we can share what we've experienced with others & invite them into your enormous love. Amen...