

“What do we have that we have not yet received?”
Psalm 24 Ephesians 1:3-14

I want to begin with a question, “Do you know how to fully operate everything in your household?” For example, if you have a cell phone, do you know how to fully operate all of its features? If you have a remote control for your television, do you know how to fully operate all of its features? If you have a digital camera, do you know how to fully operate all of its features? I won’t even ask about your computer. Chances are that with all of the tech devices we own, we know enough to get by, we know the basics but few if any of us know how to fully operate all of their features.

I found the cartoon from “Cathy” that is on the front of our bulletin a great illustration of this reality. (Read cartoon) “I dream of a quiet beach with nothing to do but study the set-up for my text messaging photo cell phone. I dream of five days alone with the instruction manual for my universal remote control. I dream of two full weeks with the user’s guide to me new digital camera. DOESN’T ANYONE WANT TO JUST RELAX ON VACATION ANYMORE??! I dream of a long weekend to try to decode the option’s menu on my 95-function massage chair.

There is a real sense in which all the technological devices that are supposed to make our lives easier and happier seem to be getting more and more complicated. Can I get an “Amen” on that? And along with all of those complications come increasing anxiety and alienation? It is just too much for any of us to figure out, no matter how hard we try, no matter how much time we devote.

It is very possible that this passage from Ephesians may seem just as thick and dense and difficult to understand as well. We may be tempted to just put on our spiritual “grin and bear it” expression and nod without fully understanding it at all. But I want to ask for your patience first.

If there is anyone here who is struggling today? If there is anyone here who struggles with shame? If there is anyone here who knows what it is like to be abandoned or left alone? If there is anyone here who is anxious that perhaps their life doesn’t have any meaning anymore? If there is anyone here who has wrestled with or is wrestling with despair? If there is anyone here who feels like there is no hope for them? Or if there is anyone here who feels as if the world is so evil it is not worth saving? Then Ephesians has a word for you and the word is “Blessing” and the word of blessing is within you.

St Augustine asked a question that will help us to get inside this passage? The question is this, “What do we have that we have not yet received?” That may sound like a strange question, but it is not unlike the question I asked you at the beginning. Do you know all there is to know about you? Do you suppose that it

is just possible that there is more to you than you had imagined? And if so, what might that be? Do you suppose that it is just possible that the one who created you might know more about you than you do yourself?

The first word we hear is blessed, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and God has blessed us, how?, in what way?, with what?, WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES. You already have every spiritual blessing, you already have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within you, why do we say that?, because we are so good – we know each other too well to say that, because we are so smart – not a chance, we have that incredible blessing because God created us with it.

I heard a story about a young family that was blessed with a young son that gave them so much joy, and he was an incredibly happy young boy and full of energy and full of creativity and full of playfulness, and when he was three years old his mother became pregnant with another child and at first the young boy was excited but after his sister was born he wasn't quite so sure. She was very cute and all but things weren't quite the same anymore, he didn't quite get all of the attention. He was at least a little jealous of all the attention his sister was getting.

After several months the little boy told his mother that he would really like the chance to be with his sister all by himself. His mother wasn't convinced that this was a good idea, but the little boy was very insistent that it was very important for him to have some time with his sister all by himself. So finally the parents came up with a little plan. They told the little boy that they would be downstairs so he could spend a little time with his sister alone with her in her bedroom but they made sure to leave the baby monitor on in the bedroom so they could at least hear what was going on.

They went downstairs while the little boy went into his sister's nursery. The mother and father listened carefully at the monitor and what they heard was this. The little boy leaned over the crib and said to his infant sister, "Tell me about God. I am beginning to forget. It is getting harder for me to remember. Tell me about God."

Now, that little story may not be literally true, but I love it because it is spiritually true. God creates each of us with the imbedded and indwelling capacity to directly experience God present in our experience. But a normal, inevitable part of the human condition is that we lose the memory to live in the fullness of that presence of God. That is what makes forgiveness so difficult for us. That is what makes us anxious. That is why we are prone to worry. That is why we are judgmental of others. That is why we think that we need to be better than others. We have separated ourselves from the source of our blessedness. It is what Augustine had in mind when he asked, "What do we have that we have not yet received?"

This incredible blessing of God's presence is the source of our capacity to love, and the closer we are to that love the more we will have the courage to let go of all violence, the more we will have the capacity to forgive as Jesus teaches us to forgive, the more we will have the capacity to love our enemies as Jesus commands us to do.

The reality is that we are all like that little boy, we all forget that essence of who we are at our center of being. There is something even more amazing about this expression of God's grace as well. This blessing of God's indwelling presence is not there by accident and neither is it within us because God just waved some kind of magic wand and spread it around. It is within us because we are chosen, individually destined for adoption as a child of God.

You, yes, you are individually chosen for the indwelling of God's presence and spirit within you. I am aware of some of my shortcomings, not all of them, but some of them, and I am aware that when I stand in this pulpit and preach I have a tendency to not really look anybody in the eye, to just kind of glaze over the congregation as a whole. That is just one of my shortcomings; those of you that have been listening to me for a while, I am sure you could name a few more, but the reason I mention this is that I wish I could look each one of you directly and personally in the eye, make direct eye contact to tell you that the reason God's spirit dwells with you is because from the very beginning of creation God had you in mind to choose you to be within you. ***God had chosen you to be within you.*** Everything single one of you. This is your inheritance. This is your destiny.

Now the reality is that inheritances are a blessing, but they are a blessing that comes with a tension and this spiritual inheritance is not exception. The tension is embodied right here in Ephesians as well. We are chosen. We have redemption. We have forgiveness. We are God's children through faith in Jesus Christ.

The tension is where does that leave everyone else? The tension comes about because we want God to make sense to us, we want God to conform to our sense of fairness, our sense of justice. But God does not look on this like we do at all. The God we know in Jesus Christ is gracious and merciful beyond the wildest reaches of our imaginations. The only reason that the Psalmist said that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" is because the psalmist didn't have a hubble telescope to look into the farthest reaches of the milky way. The psalmist didn't have an electron microscope to look into the intricacy of every living cell, but still he knew that there is no expanse of creation and no detail of creation that does not contain the indwelling spirit of God.

There is nothing in all of creation that God considers expendable, no created being that God says, "Oh, that one is beyond hope; that one is just too damaged; that one is too far gone; that one is too sinful; that one is too evil, no not one."

Why do I say that? It says right here in Ephesians (vs 10) what God's plan is for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, all things, all that God has created. All means ALL.

Within that promise of salvation is both great potential, great hope and great challenge for us as well. Let me ask you: can you picture people who really get under your skin? Can you think of people who you just can't bring yourself to forgive? Can you think of people who you really believe that we would just be better off without? Can you? This is the challenge – you are going to be spending eternity with these very people. How long will it take for you to begin to see God's image within them? How long will it take for you to let go of your resentments for we cannot live for the praise of the glory of God in Christ Jesus without letting go of all the ways we refuse to love others.

This is a life long pilgrimage for each of God's children. It asks great courage of each of us in every circumstance of life, each day of our lives. This is not just something we work on one day a week when we come to church on Sunday. Every place we go and every circumstance in which we find ourselves is a laboratory to work this out. Up to and including trips to Mc Donalds.

A good friend of mine was telling me how the Spirit worked in his life on a trip to Mc Donalds. He had been to an evening prayer meeting at a church and on the way home he felt a little hungry so he pulled into a McDonalds. It was near closing time but he went inside. He was waited on by a young man who could have been his grandson. He ordered a cheeseburger with extra pickle and extra onions. It was pretty clear that the young man didn't especially care for the extra order, but in a couple minutes the order came up and the young man picked up the cheeseburger and put it into a wrapper.

My friend asked the young man, "Did you use a glove before you wrapped my cheeseburger?"

"NO, I didn't. Does it really make any difference?! Do you want another cheeseburger?" the young man asked, very sarcastically.

"Well, yes I would," my friend replied.

So they waited a few more minutes. Finally, the cheeseburger appeared, and the young man, in a very exaggerated fashion showed his hand and put a glove on it while saying, "Here is me putting on a glove to wrap up your cheeseburger, sir!!!"

My friend tried to describe what he was feeling at that moment. This young man was being incredibly sarcastic and disrespectful. He was old enough to be his grandfather. He said he felt as if emotionally he was going to vomit, but he just

prayed “welcome holy spirit” and took his cheeseburger and went to sit down to eat it in quiet.

God’s plan in Jesus Christ is to gather up all things in him, even smart alecky young kids at Mc Donalds.

My friend went and sat down to eat his cheeseburger, but the Spirit continued to work, and after a few minutes the young man came over and said, “Sir, I want to apologize to you. I was really out of line, and I apologize for being so rude. Please forgive me.” Now, this is not exactly a major advance toward world peace, but it is a step in that direction and that is what we are each asked to do, to step in that direction.

This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

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

Rev Stephen Hoffman
First United Methodist Church of Palmetto
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