

Practicing Resurrection...Chosen for God's Purpose
Ephesians 1:1-10
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Over the years we've discovered that the summer provides a great opportunity for us to study a whole book of the Bible; the more relaxed season may allow you to meditate upon each text before Sunday's message. When you're on vacation you can keep up with the reading, even download messages that you missed from the website; put them on a CD and listen to them during those long trips in the car ☺. After eating at Cracker Barrel our family went to the books-on-tape section to check something out to listen to on the long road to North Carolina, but we couldn't find a book that appealed to everyone. Later on it occurred to us, "We could have listened to Pastor Hoyt!"

This summer we're going to explore Paul's letter to the Ephesians, so turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 1. Please bring a Bible each week and join me in underlining key words and phrases. If you don't have a Bible I hope you'll take one of the pew Bibles, use it, and feel free to take it home with you.

I will spend 3-4 hours each week studying the passage, drawing upon my modest knowledge of the original Greek language in order to bring fresh insights to our conversation. I am also referencing several commentaries in order to avoid blind spots or misperceptions. One of those commentaries is a new one by Eugene Peterson, the incredible biblical scholar who gave us *The Message*, his paraphrase of the New Testament. This commentary on Ephesians, called Practice Resurrection is Peterson's latest book. It's very readable and helpful. I heard Peterson speak at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando this spring; his talk focused on Ephesians; he said that Paul wrote Ephesians because he saw the church as the appointed gathering of people who "practice a life of resurrection in a world where death gets the biggest headlines." Verses 1-2:

*¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
 To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:
²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

While not nearly as lengthy as Romans, Ephesians is similar; it probes the rich depths of the good news of Jesus Christ, in order to refresh our hope and direct our path. Without hesitation, Paul again declares himself an "apostle," one sent out by God to bear witness to Jesus and build up Christ's church, people Paul insists on calling "saints." The actual word is *hagios*, "holy ones;" people who are holy in God's eyes not because of their good deeds but because of what God has done in Christ. According to Peterson, Paul was determined to help readers appreciate how the church is God's great gift to us. Because it's so easy for us to get discouraged about the church,

Ephesians is a revelation of the church we never see...it is an inside look at what is beneath and behind and within the church that we do see wherever and whenever it becomes visible.

Paul understood that despite all her blemishes, the church is God's main way that God makes Himself known, and God's tool for growing us to spiritual maturity:

Ephesians has remained the best text in the entire Bible for getting us in on what is involved behind the scenes in our congregations as we 'grow up healthy in God, robust in love.' (Eph.4:16, The Message).

As frustrated as we might be with the church, being part of Christ's homely bride is our main way to experience verse 2, to receive "grace and peace...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

In order to understand how God is working, Paul then plunges into an over-the-top celebration of the sovereign God's transforming grace. Paul got so carried away that he wrote a sentence so long that it covers 11 English verses. The English translators rendered the 201 Greek word sentence into 8 English sentences. One scholar called it "the most monstrous sentence conglomeration...I have ever met in the Greek language!" (Peterson, 53). Apparently Paul was in such awe of God's redeeming activity that he just forgot the niceties of grammar. (Unlike me he didn't hire an editor for his dissertation☺)

As I read through Paul's enraptured prose, we'll do well to focus on seven verbs that help us to glimpse God's amazing activity, concepts that we will explore in depth as we go through the summer.

*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.* Heaven is the storehouse of God's blessing; every good gift from the heavenly storehouse is to become ours because the Father sent the Son!

*For **he chose us** in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight; in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.* Ooh, we're going to explore the mystery of election, how God initiated our relationship, not waiting for us to choose Him. Our lives are not random; God has **destined us** not only to be his children but to become perfect in every way, true sons and daughters of the holy God.

Next week we will explore the controversial doctrine of predestination. Many Christians are wary of talking about predestination because some theologians have portrayed God as an arbitrary tyrant. Paul will help us grasp the mystery of how we discover ourselves believing in Jesus because God has chosen us. Look at the end of verse 5. He chooses and adopts us *in accordance with His pleasure and will, to the praise of His glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One that He loves.* Imagine a couple who are extremely wealthy but have no one with whom to share their abundance; it becomes their greatest pleasure to choose to adopt children, an act of sheer grace.

Verse 7 reminds us that God the Father's blessing, choosing, predestining, adopting, and bestowing through "the One God loves" are the result of a specific historical event, *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that **God lavished** on us with all wisdom and understanding.* It's crucial that people understand that God's richest blessings are available only through Jesus' death on the cross; he suffered and died so that God might lavish us with the best gifts from the heavenly storehouse. For those of us who have accepted our chosen-ness, verse 9 says, *he has **made known** to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment.* Though we can't predict earth's future, we who know Christ know how time will end; God *will bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.* God's plan is to **gather up** everyone and everything that can be brought into God's perfect Kingdom. In the end, everything that has gone wrong will be restored. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, *every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.* (2:10, 11)

In the rest of his letter, Paul probes the depths of this incredibly good news. We'll spend the summer exploring these seven phrases. For today, let's simply recognize that marvelous reality that **God starts**

everything! As Eugene Peterson wrote “the practice of resurrection is not a do-it-yourself self-help project. It is God’s project, and he is engaged full-time in carrying it out.” (p. 68)

Yet we are not robots; we are creatures God created for authentic relationship; relationships are by definition two-sided. So while we can’t transform or resurrect ourselves, **our primary response is to receive**. With open hands we receive the gift of eternal life and make it our business to practice resurrection.

This week the world of baseball gave us a glimpse of what it means to practice resurrection. After being in the minor leagues earlier this spring, Armando Galarraga of the Detroit Tigers was one out away from the rarest of achievements in baseball—pitching a perfect game. The batter hit a simple grounder to the 1st baseman, so the pitcher covered 1st and took the throw that easily beat the runner. But Jim Joyce, the first base umpire, wrongly called the runner safe, ruining Galarraga’s perfect game, while tainting his own otherwise stellar reputation. Because Major League Baseball is such a legalistic enterprise, making no exceptions to its rules, both men suffered from this tragedy. Yet the lingering image is that of grace. As George Vecsey wrote “what everybody must take from this mistake is that the umpire had the courage to apologize, and the pitcher had the grace to accept the subsequent one-hitter and the apology.” (New York Times, June 3, 2010)

I have no idea whether these two men profess the Christian faith; but it is truly remarkable for a high achieving pitcher to forgive generously and a thick-skinned umpire to weep with such humility. As we move into our time of Communion with our Lord, let’s remember that our ability to forgive is dependent on our ability to receive—God’s grace is what yields graciousness. If we can be more like the weeping umpire, we’ll become more like the forgiving pitcher. Let’s welcome divine forgiveness, which will surely transform us into channels of grace.