**January 3, 2021 Ephesians 1:3-14**

***A Destiny in Love***

**Scripture:** Ephesians 1:3-14 NRSV

***(3)****Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,* ***(4)****just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.* ***(5)****He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,* ***(6)****to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.* ***(7)****In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace* ***(8)****that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight* ***(9)****he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,* ***(10)****as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.* ***(11)****In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will,* ***(12)****so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.* ***(13)****In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;* ***(14)****this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*

**Notes:**

1. We are recipients of ***grace*** because of what Jesus did for us.
   1. How can we show this same ***love*** and ***grace*** to others?
   2. What can we do to extend ***grace*** to those in need?
2. We are to be a people who is ***forgiven***.
   1. Because of God’s free ***grace*** we do not have to live with guilt, shame, and feelings of regret and condemnation.
   2. God takes ***broken*** things and makes something ***glorious***.
   3. We are to be a people who are ***united***.
3. The church is made up of those ***united*** in the name of Christ.”
   1. ***Unity*** in the church is an essential element of our ***faith***.
   2. To be “***destined*** in love” is to share the ministry of Jesus,
4. The Church at Ephesus was a ***faithful*** community because of what God had done,
   1. The glue that holds us together is ***God’s*** ***grace***.
   2. God’s ***plan*** is all things fall under the Lordship of Christ.
5. What is God ***preparing*** ***you*** to do in His Kingdom,
   1. You are called to engage in the ***fellowship*** of believers.
   2. You are called to be a ***disciple*** of Christ.
   3. You are called to be an ***evangelist***.
   4. Our role is to be the ***physical*** ***body*** of Christ in this world.
   5. Our ***destiny***, is to be loved by Christ.

**Script:**

I watched a new movie this past week. It is about a musician who has finally achieved his life’s desire only to die due to an accident. As he ascends the escalator to eternity, he realizes that he is not ready for the great beyond and struggles to overcome death and return to earth to fulfill what he believes to be his purpose, his destiny. As I pondered this movie, I wondered about destiny; I wonder what destiny truly is and what it means. Can a person’s destiny be changed? Who determines a person’s destiny?

We ask questions like these and we encounter disagreements between different factions of the Christian faith. We live in a culture where people or groups are judged by how successful they are. Winning and notoriety are more important values than acts of love and kindness. The disagreements between different factions of the Christian faith have developed into a division between the Christian church and at times has been the focus of some very ugly actions. Oh, if we could get past that things that divide us and reunite under the things that we agree upon to be true.

Today we are looking at our passage from Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus. Paul is approaching the idea that they are destined for something, saying they were “destined in love.” They were engaging in a post-Christmas activity that required them to live a life of love. They had been selected and so designated because of who they were. The church in Ephesus was not like most churches, they were a church without conflict. There were no pressing issues or problems that Paul is addressing. In fact, the Ephesian church was one of Paul’s most successful missions. To be destined in love is to be a people who are committed to making their number one priority the act of sharing God’s love. We see this in our passage for today found in Ephesians 1:3-14. Join me as we share in the reading of our passage today.

*Ephesians 1:3-14 NRSV (3)Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (4)just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. (5)He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, (6)to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (7)In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (8)that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight (9)he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, (10)as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (11)In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, (12)so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. (13)In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; (14)this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*

The church at Ephesus was a faithful church, a church Paul could count on. It was the “crown jewel” of the churches in Asia Minor. But, even the faithful need to be reminded of the essential elements of the faith now and then. They are after all, still human, capable of making mistakes and forgetting what they are about. In this letter Paul is attempting to raise the conscious level of the believers, and summarize what it means to be the true church of God.

The letter begins with a message about God’s grace. What better way to begin a new year than to hear a word about the grace of God? The message is mostly about what God does, not what the faithful do. Grace is a free gift, not something we have to earn or purchase. We are the recipients of grace because of what Jesus did for us, not anything else; not anything we did for ourselves and not anything you may have done for somebody else; only because of Jesus love for us and his sacrificial act for you and me.

How can we show this same love and grace to others? I read a story this week about Beethoven, I believe you know who I mean, Ludwig Van Beethoven the great music composer. You may not be a fan of Beethoven. But in this story, I learned something I have never heard before. Beethoven wasn’t known for his social grace. Because of his deafness, he found conversation difficult and humiliating. When he heard of the death of a friend’s son, Beethoven hurried to the house, overcome with grief. He had no words of comfort to offer. But he saw a piano in the room. For the next half hour, he played the piano, pouring out his emotions in the most eloquent way he could. When he finished playing, he left. The friend later remarked that no one else’s visit had meant so much. (from *More Stories for the Heart*, by Alice Gray) What can we do to express our love for others, what can we do to extend grace to those in need?

Paul also speaks of forgiveness. We have celebrated the end of another year, 2020 has ended; it is over, finished. Throughout the year we have all had to make sacrifices; we have all suffered a little; and we have all been hurt or wronged in some way by somebody else. Maybe it was a close friend, maybe it was somebody else we know but are not very close to. And, maybe it was somebody who we do not have contact with, perhaps it was our president, our representators and senators, maybe even our governor. We cannot change what has happened. We cannot turn the clock back and undo anything that was done. It is history. We have no choice but to live in this new day and this new year. The same is true for our failures, our mistakes, our sins and those we may have hurt. But because of God’s free grace we do not have to live with guilt, we do not have to live with our shame, and we do not have to live with these feelings of regret and condemnation. If we lay our concerns at the feet of Jesus; if we ask him for his forgiveness, then we are forgiven. We can look to the new year 2021 with a clean slate.

Billy Graham once told a story about the 1929 Rose Bowl, when Georgia Tech played the University of California. In the game a player recovered a fumble, but became confused and ran the wrong way. A teammate tackled him before he was able to enter the end zone and score a touchdown for the other team. At halftime all of the players enter the locker room and sit down, wondering what the coach was going to say. And the young man who recovered the fumble found a secluded spot and sat by himself, he put a towel over his head and cried. Have you ever been there, messing things up so bad that you thought you would never be able to recover?

I do not know what the coach said during his halftime pep talk; but, when the team was ready to leave the locker room and go back onto the field for the second half, the coach stunned everybody by announcing that all of the same players who started the first half would be starting the second, including the young many who ran the wrong way. The players headed back to the field except for the young man who would not budge. The coached called him to come but he said, “Coach, I can’t do it. I’ve ruined you. I’ve disgraced the University of California. I can’t face that crowd in the stadium again.” The coach put his hand on the player’s shoulder and said, “Get up and go back in. The game is only half over.”

I remember messing things up that bad. As an 8-year-old I sang with two of my cousins in a trio. In our first public performance I sang the wrong line and stopped in the middle of the song to correct my cousins for the mistake. I was humiliated, I was embarrassed, I was devastated. I was never going to be able to sing in front of the church again, or so I thought, look where I am today. Leading worship in church and still singing the wrong lines. But I live by the motto, make a joyful noise unto the Lord; and whether you sing off key, out of time or just the wrong words; you will still be blessing somebody and giving glory to the Lord. No matter how bad we have messed a situation up, our lives are not over; we have opportunities ahead of us to bring glory to the Lord. God is in the business of taking broken things, our broken lives, and messed up situations and making something glorious out of them. God forgives us for our mistakes, even for the times when we have gone in the wrong direction. And He uses us to make something better.

Besides being persons who are forgiven, we are to be people who are united. Paul’s message also addresses the importance of being bound together, “to unite all things in him (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth.” God’s purpose for us as a church is to work as a team. I have said this many times before, “this church is not made up of the brick and mortar that make up this building. The church is made up of the love, convictions, personalities and faces of those who are united together in the name of Christ.”

If you come to this place each weak just to hear my words and wisdom, you will leave disappointed. But if you come each week, expecting to hear from and listening for the voice of God to speak, then you will go away filled and energized. This church is more than a pastor who sings the wrong lines of the Hymns; it is a body of believers who are doing their best to share the love, mercy, and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to a community that is lost, lonely, hurting, and seeking.

What happens when I come down sick on a Sunday Morning and I am not able to perform my duties? Who will rise up to lead worship? Who will ask the question, “How have you been FED this week and where have you seen the hand of God at work?” Who will lead us in prayer? And, who will share the word of the Lord, who will read the scripture and share what it means? We have been blessed; I have been able to be here every week except for the few weeks that I have been away on vacation. I ask these questions not to give you a heads up that it might happen, I pray that it never does. I ask these questions to prepare you; to be a part of a team means that sooner or later you get put into the game; are you prepared to do so? You must be prepared to play your position to its very best. I guess the question I am getting at, what is the Lord preparing you to do.

There are times when we have to let go of our pride and allow others to do our work for us. I know we all need to be a team player. Unity in the church is an essential element of our faith. Many times the reason a church fails is because a small minority of people want their own way. Or maybe, the church fails to connect with the larger community, preventing them from developing relationships beyond themselves. To be “destined in love” is to share together the mission and ministry of Jesus, the ministry and mission of the church.

The Church at Ephesus could not stand alone. They needed this message to guard themselves from total self-reliance. By reminding them that God’s grace was freely given they were reminded that one of the very reasons they were a faithful community was because of what God had done, not what they did for themselves. People of faith are to live “to the praise of God’s glorious grace.” God wants us to live with a thankful heart, in praise for all God has done and is doing.

We are not a club; we are not a business; and we are not a group of spectators seated in the stands watching the game. We are a community of believers, who share one common denominator. The glue that holds us together is God’s grace. We are all loved and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, saved by his grace and destined in love. We are a collection of people who come from different places and backgrounds, with varying personalities, interests and skill sets; but are united in the mission of God. God’s plan is that all things come under the Lordship of Christ; a universal acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord of all.

What is God preparing you to do in His Kingdom, and are you doing your part in this calling? As part of the church, you are called to submit to the Lordship of Christ; is Jesus Lord of your life, does he influence the decisions that are made? You are called to engage in the fellowship of believers; it is nearly impossible to be a part of the body of Christ, the church, if you do not associate with the others member of the body. Are you engaging in fellowship with the other members? You are called to be a disciple of Christ, are you being discipled, are you learning from other members of the body of Christ; and are you discipling those around you with less experience? You are called to be an evangelist. As an evangelist you must share the story of Jesus, sharing the love of Christ to all you encounter. Help them to see Jesus in your actions, share with them how Jesus died for our sins and rose on the third day conquering death forever.

That is the calling of each of us who are a part of this church, this body of believers here in Ryot; the body of believers who make up the church universal. We must be shining the light of God into the dark places of this world, revealing sin and showing how to escape it. We are participants in the greatest movement ever; one that has begun when man first fell to sin, and will continue until Jesus returns again to establish His kingdom forever. Our role is to be the physical body of Christ in this world, working to unite all things on heaven and earth together under the Lordship of Christ and His kingdom. And our destiny, is to be loved by Christ; and if we choose to follow Him, to love the Lord our God with all we have; and to love others like Christ has loved us.