

Sermon 12 July 2015
2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19 Ephesians 1:3-14 'What we contribute'

Prayer: Creator God, you have created a family, and you invite all people to become brothers and sisters with one another, and with Christ. May we trust you to guide our contributions to the healing of the brokenness that divides. May we show love for one another and the earth, living out the truth of your plan for the unity of your creation, in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

"The glory of God is the human person fully alive." Is a quote from Irenaeus, Bishop in early 2nd century – c. [AD 202 of \(Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul\)](#) what is now Lyon, in France. It seemed to be a good quote to find for this week's Bible readings and our reflection title. What we contribute, the best we can offer the Lord our God, is **ourselves**. And we are very good at somehow thinking this is not good enough – but in the glorious verses from Ephesians this morning it says in **12** "so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory."

We live for the praise of God's glory, to praise God and give him glory. So we contribute to the glory of God in our living! What a fantastic vision of our daily life – of what we do each and every hour we take a breath – **we contribute to God in this world, in our communities, in our lives**. There is no restriction to who can do this / there are no exclusions to who can do this / all share because of Jesus. No wonder the writer to the *little, struggling Church in Ephesus* was **so excited** – in Jesus all belong, slave, poor, exile, immigrant, alien and resident, Jew and Gentile because of Jesus.

But our writer makes even stronger claims of what we have and what we can give, **because** we start from a place of responding to what God has already done for us. He says that God planned to adopt us before any of us were even born, making sure there was a place for us in the divine family. **Better still**, he says before we were born, God was blessing us with every Spiritual blessing in Jesus. **We were chosen in 4...** God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love."

Because of **love**, this whole passage is built on the understanding that God loves, and loved first. **God so loves** us that he sent Jesus and **Jesus so loved** that he accepted the challenge to be the Messiah; he lived and died to make this love – blessing happen. Our response is to give praise, give glory because God's plan for us to holy and blameless before him – can now happen because of Jesus.

It is through Jesus the two essentials for God's plan as described here, work for all who respond: 1. Divine forgiveness and 2. The vision of a transformed world. Our faith refuses to let us remain independent from the world around us. We cannot be a Christian and ignore what is happening in our world. We are called to contribute to the transforming of our world (1:13) into the place of God's total presence where brokenness is healed and peace and justice rule!

The writer uses language from the world of business to try and explain what he means about how we can do this, when he ^{*2}speaks of being 'sealed', receiving 'a guarantee of inheritance', looking forward to 'redemption of what has been purchased', all these words reflect the language of commercial transactions.

^{*2}The Spirit is the advance instalment of the fulfilled vision. Isn't that a wonderful picture – the Spirit in us is **only an advance** instalment of what God is planning. In my background reading this week I found this from Annie Dillard: ^{*3} "Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?...It is madness to wear ladies' straw or velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews" (*Teaching a Stone to Talk*)." We have no idea of the power given to us so that we can contribute meaningfully to the completing of God's plan for the world!

^{*1} Katherine Matthews, ^{*2} W Loader, ^{*3} Annie Dillard, ^{*4} H Wallace,

The Spirit we have, is an advance instalment to help us contribute to God's plan and help us fulfil his vision. We may not be sure what the whole vision will be like, but we already know it will have the characteristics we recognise as the Spirit of God. We know this means it will include praise and glory, mystery and grace; ecstasy and wonders; blessings and love.

^{*2} Our spiritual life, our **fully** human life happens when we are contributing to this plan for all people and all creation to be one in God. To contribute to a time when the glory of God fills the earth and the world finds that all barriers and prejudices are **broken down**, all people are respected, honoured and graced with a place at the table of Jesus so that **reconciliation and hope in love** comes true for all. ^{*2}Loader says this is "a single and big vision of justice and peace, in which we, too, are invited to share."

God's people have always had this vision 'breaking 'into their lives. We have just reflected about it through the letter to the people in Ephesus, and at the very end of the Old Testament passage today – the people celebrated the presence of God among them by sharing in vs 18,19 'a meal of a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.' The picture God wants us to have and work for is one where the resources are shared among **all** the people.

At this point, in the Story of David and his people this is the situation. The meal is the **conclusion** of a time of worship, the Bible describes it this way in vs 18, 19: 'When David had finished offering the burnt sacrifices, and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each one.'

The time of worship was because they had returned the ark of the Lord to its right place – in the **centre of the life** of the Nation. At this point in their story it was in Jerusalem, David's newly restored capital, of course there was no Temple – yet, so the Ark was housed in a tent. There are slight differences about what was exactly kept in the Ark – but whether it was a copy of the covenant between God and the people or Moses' stone tablets with the Law; both support the fact the **Ark represented** the relationship between **God and his** people.

David's was a great achievement to restore the Ark to the people. The Philistines had captured it in battle, but within 7 months, 5 Philistine Kings returned it with additional offerings of good-will! It had remained just outside Jerusalem for about 20 years, and so when David's new capital was ready he set about bringing it home. One of the things we can say in these memories about the ark is that it is not just a "pretty box" with some religious relics in. ^{*4}It represented the presence of God among the people and as such shared in the **holiness**, the otherness, of God.

It is a mystery – *to use the writer of Ephesians' words*, a mystery about God – the **Holy One** is present with us – and wants to be with us. For the ancient Israelites they understood one of those ways God was present was through / with the Ark. And so what we read about today was their celebration – joy – praise and worship because they knew God was with them in a very special way. David represented this excitement / joy / celebration by dancing as he led his people, a man fully alive in that moment of time!

And it is *part of the mystery* that we discover our full humanity when God is present with us, a mystery how even though we live, we are fully alive when we celebrate in the presence of the Lord. David danced, and the writer to the Ephesians poured out his inspiring words about the blessings we have as both an inheritance to receive and a gift to pass on.

This all belongs to the 'plan' that continues to break into our time, our lives showing again and again how God brings everything together in one marvellous unity in Christ, and calls us, commissions us, invites us to contribute with praise and glory. Amen