# What’s in it for us?

Ephesians 1:3-14  
Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

July 15, 2012

Will Fitzgerald

We live in confusing times. One of the confusing things about being a Christian in the United States at the current time is what a bad reputation the church has. The church, which has been the cradle of so many things of which we are proud as Americans, such as participatory democracy itself, the freedom of conscience, the overthrow of slavery and the Civil Rights movement., this church is now known for a hardness and a mostly defensive posture on issues of culture, ethics, and politics, when it’s not known for sexual scandal and abuse.

It naturally brings out the question — why should we be followers of Christ, when so many fellow travelers are not people we would want to associate? Why should be invite people into this mare’s nest? Are we in danger, as Jesus warned, of making people into twice the children of hell they would be otherwise?

I should make it clear that we are getting some bad press that we don’t deserve. What comes to mind immediately is the Westboro Baptist Church, the hate group that pickets military funeral and declares that “God hates fags.” This is a miniscule group, very good at PR, that does not represent anyone but themselves. People read news about them, and assume that it’s a wider-spread phenomenon than it is. It would be more honest journalism if they were just ignored. But still, the abuse scandal is real, the identification of the church with certain harsh politics is real, and it will do us good to step back and ask, what good is it to be a Christian?

One of our scripture passages for this morning, Ephesians 1:3-14, has answers for us. Let’s re-read this together. As we read it, I’d like you to listen for words that are different ways to say “good.” For example, the very first word is “blessed.” What other ways of saying something is “blessed” or “in a blessed state” are there?

Here are some of the “good words” that I saw: Blessed / Every blessing / Praise / Riches/ Lavished / Pleasure / Good Pleasure / Glory / Fulfillment

In fact, this first part of the letter to the Ephesians is almost more like a poem that a like a piece of theology; a lyrical meditation on just what we want to know: why should we continue on in the movement of God? Although I suspect it is not exhaustive, we can pick up some real insight for the answer to our question. I want to group these into four different buckets — begin chosen, becoming good, gaining insight, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and living in glory.

We read “God … has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,” very flowery language meaning we have received every good thing directly from God, as a result of God’s choice, good things flowing freely from God’s house, as it were (the “heavenly places”) to ours.

## Being chosen

There is a lot of language in this passage about how God has specifically chosen us for a good life. Before the beginning of the universe, more than 4 billion years ago, in fact, before time itself began, God decided to choose us. God has chosen to adopt us, to bring us into the family. As a parent of two adopted children, I know how deep our choice was to bring our children into our family, and how, once they were in it, they became completely part of our family. God began the adoption process in countless eons past.

God has also chosen to redeem us. We have “redemption through [Christ’s] blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.” It is not only that God chose us from the beginning of time to receive good things, but also that God had to go out of the way to do so, because we were lost in our way, and God had to go outside God’s boundaries, as it were, to bring us back from our slavery. Somehow, through the death of Christ, God chose to pay a price to free us. There is a theological debate as to whether God paid more than God needed to in order to set us free. But in this passage, the emphasis is on God’s generous grace, the riches God spent on our behalf, that he “lavished” these riches on us. I like the idea that God loves us so much that God paid a high price for us; like an eager buyer at an auction he bid and bid again until he won the prize. Since what God won was us, God must see more in us than we see ourselves.

## Becoming good

A second bucket has to do with becoming and being good. Have you ever had that sense of wanting to be a better person than you are? God has got you covered. This is what God has chosen us for, to “be holy and blameless before him in love.” When the Jews were going to sacrifice the Passover lamb, the lamb had to be perfect, and without any blemish at all. This has been extended to us, from the world of ritual to the world of the moral life. God’s expressed purpose is to make us better people. We will be holy and blameless before God, transformed by God’s love. So, if you have that deep desire to be a good person, the good news is this: you can be, you will be. We’ll have our rises and our falls, but it’s not true that people won’t change their basic nature — God’s promise is otherwise.

## Gaining insight

A third bucket: following God gives us deep insight into the way the moral universe works. God has “made known to us the mystery of his will,” the “plan for the fullness of time.” Do you ever wonder if there is a purpose to life? If there’s a reason you are here on this Earth? God will tell you that purpose.

The broad outlines are spelled out here:

As we said, before time began, God decided to carry out what seems like a mad scheme: to create a people that live their lives in holiness and love to be God’s own children. He did this through the Son, Jesus Christ, who came to live and die for us. God’s plan to is “gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.” God does this out of his own “good pleasure,” a delightful phrase. God does things because it pleases him, and what pleases him is to create a family of brothers and sisters in Christ to live before him as a holy, loving people. We are becoming God’s children. And so, we are living in the great gathering stage of God’s work. Someday, all things will be gathered up!

## The gift of the Holy Spirit

A fourth bucket: the Holy Spirit. As we wait for the gathering to finish, God has given us a down-payment on the riches which he will eventually lavish upon us. This down-payment is the Holy Spirit, given to us in the church. We are stamped with the Holy Spirit’s seal. We don’t get a lot of details about this gift here, but it’s safe to say that it is the Holy Spirit who reminds us that can cry “Abba, Father” to God, acknowledging our status as God’s adopted children, who prompts us toward holiness, and grants us insight into God’s plan for our lives and for the world.

## Living in glory

Finally, let’s try to get into the spirit of this paragraph. You probably noticed that it has a song-like quality, very poetic. As in many of the Pauline letters, its an introductory eulogy — an expression of joy and blessing, in which God is praised for who God is and what God has done. In fact, these verses form one long sentence in the Greek. It’s all of a piece. It’s “all good.” Getting into this spirit of praise and thanksgiving, and the joy that it brings to do so, is another advantage of the Christian walk. We’re not meant to live in a constant state of ecstasy — the letter here goes on to discuss a lot of church-related business, for example — but there is a time and a place for reveling in the goodness of what has happened. God has chosen us as the recipients of his gifts. He has allotted us an inheritance. Looking at verse 11, it reads “we have obtained an inheritance,” and this perhaps more literally just “allotted.” In order words, God has destined us to win the lottery of life, to get the jackpot. Now, how do people feel when they win the jackpot? That’s the spirit of joy that this eulogy is written, and that’s the spirit we can enjoy, too.

So, what’s in it for us?

A sense of belonging and feeling chosen; a hard struggle but a promise of becoming better people; insight into the very nature of the moral universe; the presence of the Holy Spirit; and, once in a while, an ecstatic joy at what God has done for us.

“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!”