

PENTECOST 8 YEAR B
AMOS 7:7-15
EPHESIANS 1:3-14
MARK 6:14-29
JULY 14, 15, 2018

The Lord blesses us in many wonderful ways. We are blessed as individuals and we blessed as a congregation. Paul thanks God for the blessing of the church at Ephesus. He thanks God for the blessings each Christian brought to that church but also for the church as a whole. As I reflect on our Vacation Bible School I see the blessings of God at work in our church. We are blessed to have kids, leaders and parents who are excited to be part of the churches teaching ministry. As a church it is easy for us to get caught up in the practical and physical parts of our existence and forget about the spiritual blessings that come from our Lord. We have many spiritual blessings among us. I think God for each one and seek to find ways to share those blessings so that the church is enriched. God blesses us so that we will be a blessing to others.

Ephesians 1:3, 4 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.

In the church we might allow ourselves to get distracted by the things that are of personal importance to us as individuals and forget that the church is about reaching out in love for others. It is OK to have desires and things that are meaningful. God created us to have desires and to find meaning in many things. They are part of who we are as people of God. Each of us has those parts of a church service that are more meaningful than other parts. Those parts might help us grow in faith and in our Christian walk. It is OK to hang onto those while allowing others to also find value in other things. What is important to me must not get into the way of growth in the entire body of Christ. God blesses the church. God blesses us with spiritual gifts so that God's people will be cared for. Although God blesses individuals with spiritual blessings, God also blesses the church. We are blessed with the invitation to

become part of the body of Christ. We come to the waters of baptism where we become part of the body of Christ. At his baptism Jesus did not only become an individual blessed by God. In baptism Jesus also identified with us. In our baptism God invites us to be identified with Christ. In one sense Jesus became part of the community of believers. It may be difficult to think of Jesus as being part of the community of believers but Jesus is the head of the community of believers. He is the head of the body of Christ.

When our Lord Jesus prayed for his disciples he prayed that they would be one body. The Lord did not pray that each would be divided from the others but that they would be one. Our Lord knows that each have likes and dislikes but that must not divide the body of Christ. If we are to be one as the Father and Son are One we must also seek to strengthen the body. Sometimes this means letting go of our individual likes and dislikes. It means loving our neighbor.

As the blessed community of believers we are invited and even commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves. Our neighbors are near and far. Our neighbors are those that lose everything in the waters of a flood or in a house fire that left them homeless. They are our neighbors even if they do not live next door. God calls us to be a blessing to our neighbors. This means that we are called as a congregation to fund our trip to the National Youth Gathering so that our kids experience something beyond themselves but also so the people of Houston will receive blessings because of us. It means helping out in a variety of ways so that our Vacation Bible School is successful and our kids grow in faith and knowledge of the Lord. God chose us to receive heavenly blessings. God blessed us in Christ and with Christ to be a blessing to others. Paul says that God chose us in Christ before the world was created. We are chosen to be holy and we are chosen to be blameless. We are chosen to be a different people. We are chosen to follow the Lord and to love those Jesus loved.

In Christ every event in our lives is seen and experienced through Jesus Christ and through the eyes of faith. Our greatest joys and our most cherished achievements are made new in Christ. Our strongest temptations, our biggest regrets, and our most wounding losses are seen and experienced through Christ. In Christ we are joined to the power and presence of God. In Christ we are joined to others who will cry with us when our loved ones have died. In Christ they will sing for us even as they help us sing hymns of resurrection. At the same time, being in Christ is not a sentimental togetherness. The community in Christ has to come to the understanding that it will sometimes be seen as more of a threat than a blessing. Part of the community's calling is to be a truth-telling and truth-living community. We are a reflection of the God who has called it into being.

Ephesians 1:13, 14 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; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

In Christ we hear the word of truth. When Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate there was a question about truth. Pilate wanted to know the truth. The truth is Jesus Christ. The truth is that he is our life and our salvation. You and I know the truth because we have listened to Jesus as he taught and continues to teach through God's word. In Christ you are God's people. In Christ you are a chosen people. You are inheritors of eternal life. You have received every blessing from God and you are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Since we are blessed we are also to be a blessing. When we are sealed with the Holy Spirit we are assured of the greater blessings to come. We get to enjoy what our Lord gives in this life and then receive a greater blessing later as we greet the Lord at his throne. We that are created in the image of God are becoming what God created us to be. The Lord God created us in God's image and we are God's children. We are God's children receiving individual blessings

but using those blessings in the body of Christ so that others will also be blessed. This comes through the activity of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Collectively the gifts of our blessings will serve our neighbor. We will also do what our Lord asks us to do. We that are chosen by God in Christ also have the greater blessing. We have eternal life. AMEN