

“Praised be the Maker of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens!” Wow! What a beautiful beginning that is to our text today. What kind of blessing is that? We are inheritors of every spiritual blessing in the heavens. Do you believe it? Do you claim it? Do you live it out in your life?

What does it feel like to let yourself be bathed in that kind of bountiful blessing? Does it cover you from head to toe? Does it make you want to go forward with love and appreciation, bestowing upon others that same kind of blessing?

Too often our Christianity and, therefore, our very lives is steeped in the negative, the punitive, the vindictive aspects of what we see as God’s rule. Rather than seeing God through the loving lens our writer of Ephesians is using in this passage, we visualize our God with a hammer poised over our heads ready to let it fall as soon as we act in what we or what we think God would deem displeasing ways.

But don’t you know that, “Before the world began, God chose us in Christ to be holy and

blameless and to be full of love." In Christ we are the people we've not only always wanted to be but, indeed, are. And if God sees us as holy and blameless and full of love who are WE to say otherwise.

"In Christ," Princeton Theological Seminary professor Sally A. Brown writes, "every experience is reframed, from our most bracing joys and cherished achievements to our besetting temptations, our most anguished regrets, and our most wounding losses."

Seeing ourselves as God sees us and acting out of love and care and grace we are able to do far more than when we act out of guilt or self-recrimination.

I can point to so many times in my life when I have felt what I considered the "burden" of God's call. Knowing that I "should" do something or "should" feel something, I avoid it, turning my back on that person I feel called to minister to or help. At the root of this feeling is my own perception of God's call as being something burdensome, something I must carry on my own, forgetting in the very moment I'm feeling it that

God is actually calling me into my highest blessing.

God isn't calling me to some place or for some person to punish me or hurt me in some way. No, I'm being called to where I will be lifted higher; enabled to see above the clouds of my own making so that I may experience the "immeasurably generous" grace being poured out constantly for me.

"A favorite saying of mine," Dr. Bruce Epperly writes, "is: there are only two kinds of people in the world - those who are in God's hands and know it and those who are in God's hands and don't." This sense of God's presence - not fear of hell -, he states, "should motivate our faith and witness. We want to invite people to see God's movements in their lives. Our invitation is grounded in gratitude for God's suffering-celebrating love for us."

"God has taken pleasure in revealing the mystery of the plan through Christ, to be carried out in the fullness of time; namely, to bring all things—in heaven and on earth—together in Christ."

Our Seasons of the Spirit curriculum this

week tells us that, "in the original Greek version, today's entire reading is [actually] one long sentence that strings together praises for God and the unity of all of creation through Christ. The Ephesians – and, indeed, all people – are included in this vision of a united cosmos bringing together heaven and earth in the presence of the Christ. The integration of these many ideas into a single sentence reflects God's vision of cosmic unity."

" "In Christ" we are joined to the power and presence of God," Professor Brown writes. "In Christ" we are knit to others who will cry over our dead with us even as they help us sing hymns of resurrection. At the same time," though, she writes, "being "in Christ" is no sentimental togetherness. An "in Christ" community has to reckon with the fact that it will be perceived at times as more a threat than a blessing. Part of the community's calling is to be a truth-telling, truth-living reflection of the God who has called it into being."

And this is where our blessing leads us into our call to bless others with the message of love and unity Christ brings.

Knowing that God loves us and has brought us into being as holy and blameless allows us to go forth without fear to shed light on the ills of this world. Being filled with God's love and seeing ourselves as God's blessed children gives us the courage to call out the ways in which the light of God is placed under a bushel while the flags of injustice continue to flap in the breeze.

And what a glory happens when the bushel is removed and the flag taken down and a people soaked in repression and sorrow are given a glimpse of the glory that can take place when God's blessing is allowed to flourish.

"We live in a time of heightened sensitivity to both religious conflict and religious tolerance," our Seasons curriculum states. "New media technology facilitates the flourishing of religious extremism and discrimination, yet it also creates new opportunities for ecumenical (inter-denominational) and interfaith relationships to thrive."

Coming together under God's blessing umbrella we gain strength and courage from witnessing God at work in others and realizing

that through our connecting God's love is able to shine even brighter as it is revealed to even more and more of Her beloved children.

"This [blessing before us today]," Kate Huey writes, "is not a catechism or systematic statement of beliefs: it is heart language as much as head language, as poetry and praise ought to be... we're not just overhearing a message meant for only one church but one meant for us as well...[The writer's] sense of gratitude and wonder at everything God has done, is doing, and has promised yet to do, leads him to soaring heights of praise in which he acknowledges God as both blessed and blessing."

Consider this blessing as your own this week as you go through the paces of your life. When you hear thoughts of judgment or fear arise in your heart and your head, allow them to trigger a blessing, "in Christ I am holy and blameless and full of love." Perhaps it will make you, like our break dancer on the front of our bulletin today, dance with unbridled joy as King David did all those years ago when he "danced before God with all his might!"

As a further encouragement, let me leave you with the blessing of a piece of poem I found this week by the great Wendell Berry in his book, "This Day."

"Loving you has taught me the infinite longing of the self to be given away and the great difficulty of that entire giving, for in love to give is to receive and then there is yet more to give; and others have been born of our giving to whom the self, greatened by gifts, must be given, and by that giving be increased, until, self-burdened, the self, staggering upward in years, in fear, hope, love, and sorrow, imagines, rising like a moon, a pale moon risen in daylight over the dark woods, the Self whose gift we and all others are, the self that is by definition given."

Amen.