

Ephesians 1:3-14
Mk 6:14-29
(1209)

Pentecost 7 b P10
The Comfort of Election

7-15-18

My family in Christ, whenever we have readings such as from Ephesians 1 which brushes upon the topic of election which can be somewhat difficult to understand, I often take the opportunity to speak on it. Such is the case today.

As you have heard before, the fact that you are a Christian, that you are a saved child of God is no accident. From eternity, God elected, predestined, chose to save you; to write your name in the Book of Life and in fact has placed His Name upon you (via Baptism).

Your salvation was no accident or afterthought for Him, but purposefully He chose before the beginning of time and creation to give eternal life to you His sheep.

So firm was His will on this that He would do the impossible in order to accomplish it and secure it. Yes He knew that our 1st parents, Adam and Eve would give in to the devil's temptation and rebel against Him. Before the universe was formed He knew man would sin against Him, would reject His will and love. Before He formed you in your mother's womb, He already knew every sinful thought, word and deed you would commit through all your days. And yet, He already had purposed Himself to save you from such evil rebellion and everlasting condemnation.

He would send His Son to fulfill His Will and Law in your place, do what you could never do - be the righteous Children of God we were created to be. Jesus would come to also satisfy the justice of God, paying the price we could never pay - giving the Life we did not have, even the infinite life of God the Son to quell His wrath. We celebrate that His victorious resurrection from the grave has proven it! Our guilt has been paid for in full and the greatest step in our election to eternal life had been completed. On that day, salvation had been won. It was finished.

And yet, stubborn and spiritually dead man would still choose to reject even that most gracious and loving act of God. Remember what our Lord tells us in His Word:

Matthew 23:37 ESV "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

Fallen man, the sinful nature will always oppose God and His will. It can do no other. It wants to be its own god, or at least form a god in its own image. It is steadfast in its rejection and rebellious spirit.

Nonetheless, mankind is a spiritual being by creation. He was created to be with God and reflect His loving ways to one another. Mankind has spiritual desires, but it is a ruined and twisted spirituality. Look at all the religions of the world - all people groups have a religion, some form of spirituality (the popular spirituality of America, one that speaks of a generic god of their own making, one that suits their understanding and felt needs) - but it is a false spirituality that ultimately rejects the Gospel/Word of God.

Think of King Herod in our Gospel lesson. Here was a man who would keep a prophet of God near him, was fascinated with him, intrigued by the word John preached but with no real ears, no true spiritual understanding or hearing of the Word (for the sake of pride he would murder to keep his word before trusting in the Word of God). That is natural man's spirituality - fascinated with no understanding.

But unlike Herod, God the Holy Spirit was able to create faith in your heart. You were no better by nature than Herod. You were born with the same rejecting nature as that wicked king.

Did God love Herod less than you? No! He suffered, died and rose for his sinful guilt as well, indeed accomplished Herod's salvation as well. But Herod would continue to reject the Word of God (Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I long to gather you...but you would not).

Were you more savable than Herod? No. That would mean salvation depended on some quality in you, which clearly scripture says that is not the case.

Jesus says, **John 6:44 ESV No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.** And so, part of God's electing you to salvation means the wonderful mystery that God also is able to create faith in your heart to trust in that saving work - to create a whole new spiritually alive person within you by His grace through His Word (and sacraments). Your salvation is all His work and doing! His electing.

And what more, He preserves His sheep, keeps them safe. The Good Shepherd preserves and keeps us in the faith throughout our life. He keeps His sheep in His hand **John 10:27-29 ESV My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. (28) I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.**

This is the comfort of this doctrine of election and teaching from God's Word. Not only does He accomplish your salvation at the Cross, and creates the faith in your heart to trust in that saving work, but He also preserves you in the faith!

Several years ago I was at a deathbed where a child of God looked into the doctor's eyes and said: "Let's get this over with". The doctor asked: "Are you afraid?" The answer was: "No". Those were the words of faith. God had preserved His sheep, upholding His precious one against a lifetime's worth of assaults from the devil, the world and the sinful flesh. The Good Shepherd had kept this saint in His strong hand and finally delivered His sheep into the home He had been preparing from eternity.

So it is with you, and the comfort your Lord would have you enjoy with this teaching of election - that your salvation is sure, for is not an accident, nor an afterthought, but from eternity He has called your name and made you His sheep. It is certain because He sent His Son to pay for all your sinful guilt. He reached down into the waters of your baptism and joined you to Christ's work on the cross and empty tomb, saving you from death eternal and raising you up with Christ unto true life now and forevermore.

And as Paul reassures us in our text:
Ephesians 1:13-14 ESV In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (14) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. It was in your Baptism where God the Holy Spirit brought you into that elected grace, sealing you in your Lord's saving arms.

God has reconnected you to Himself - and the Good Shepherd is going to protect you against the predators and enemies that seek to destroy you. He is going to feed you with His Word by which He sustains and strengthens your faith and trust in His saving work. He gives you the very Bread of Life Himself in the Supper to further assure you of the grace and salvation you have received. And with this election, you know that He is able to keep you safe in His strong arms and that nothing in this world is going to be able to rip you away from Him. You are able to trust in the loving care of this Shepherd to bring you into the sheep fold of heaven.

But there is more to come, for though heaven is obviously an indescribable place of joy and relief, every sad tear wiped from our eyes as we behold our Lord face to face as we were designed to do, our Lord has purposed Himself to make all things new - to make a new heaven and new earth for us to live body and soul in eternally.

And so, on the Last Day of history, when our Lord returns in His full power and glory, the final fulfillment and realization of that election will take place as God raises up our bodies that are at rest in the grave - will restore them and

purify them from all the effects of sin, and will change and equip them for the Life everlasting to be lived in the New Creation. Our spirits which will have been with Jesus in heaven, will be rejoined with our newly resurrected and perfected bodies and we will never again taste any sorrows or loss or death. This is certain and a comfort in the face of all trials and enemies, for it is elected, determined and purposed by God for you.

Amen