7-12-15

“A Plan for the Fullness of Time”

**Scriptures:**

2 Samuel 6:1-19

Psalm 24

Ephesians 1:3-14

On my first Saturday here at Trinity, I helped at a BBQ that was hosted by the Shelby County Sherriff’s Department and our own Outreach Committee. One of our County Commissioners, Mr. Melvin Burgess, was on hand as the point person, and we got to talking. We talked about schools and economics and healthcare delivery; we talked about how Memphis is different from Nashville; we talked about how Baptists and Methodists might work together; we talked about race and reconciliation; and, of course we talked about BBQ… But then, all of a sudden, Melvin broke off, looked right at me, and said:

“Pastor, let me ask you something that’s been on my mind a long time.”

“All right,” I said, “I’d love to find out what is it you think I know that you don’t?”

“Well,” he paused, “I’ve always wanted to know…why does God choose the Jews? I mean, why does God choose one particular people anyway…and then, why the Jews?”

I stood there staring hard at nothing, because Melvin had just asked me one of the most important questions for the Church, and I was immediately drawn back into the life-long task of grappling with the mystery of God. Interpreting my studied look, Melvin said:

“You don’t need to tell me right now, Pastor, you just get back to me some time and tell me why God chooses the Jews.”

“I will, Melvin,” I replied, “I will think on that and get back to you. But I think the short answer is that God chose Abraham and Sarah; and through them, God chose the whole Creation.”

Will you please join me in prayer:

God of mystery and love,

choose us now by the power of your Spirit;

so that our inadequate words might be the sacrament

of the Eternal Living Word,

even the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask this in his Name. Amen.

Melvin’s question has been my own question for a long time. In fact, the relationship between the Body of Christ and Israel has been the question of the entire Christian movement since Paul began his letter writing campaign. The opening of the letter to the church at Ephesus is no exception; and, as with every mystery or question Paul tackles, he begins by saying something about who God is and how we relate to God.

The first thing we have to say about the God Paul is referring to, is that this God is the Creator: the Being that brings every created thing into existence. Paul makes it clear that this is the greater context in which his argument lies. He says:

“God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world…” Before the foundation of the world! What a claim. This means that while the Holy Spirit was still “hovering over the face of the deep,” as the writer of Genesis says, God was eagerly thinking of Abraham and Sarah, the children of Israel, and of you and me.

For all of us who exist within the boundaries of Time, this is a little hard to imagine… so let me use an analogy:

Along with an army of others, under the Admiralty of our own Jinx Winn, most of you know that Jessica and I have been working to make the church’s parsonage our home. This weekend involved several trips to Lowe’s Home Improvement for parts. But before going, we pictured this room and that room, trying to discern and imagine what might be needed. We wandered the as-yet-empty floorboards hatching a plan and making lists. We needed screws and tape and paint and light-bulbs and cabinet hardware, and… and… and… the list goes on.

We got back to the house and started on several projects. At one point I had an argument with a lighting fixture because it would not condescend to hang level. I must confess that at I lost my temper and opted for a “time-out.” I walked into the next room to find Jessica busily working away at some project or other; and then her sing-song voice rang out in the empty house, “How’s it going Babe? Is it time for lunch yet, Babe?” I realized that the only thing that could make that house our home was for us to be there together. No matter how well our work turned out, I could never find a home there without the one that I love: the one with whom I am called to the covenant of marriage.

And Paul believes that God feels exactly this way about us - about you, about me, and about all humankind. Listen to the rest of the sentence:

“God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world…*to be holy and blameless before him in love*.” In love. In Love! Let me stop here for a moment. Can you believe what Paul is saying? God didn’t predestine and create humanity to be servants, or minions, or even administrators.. No, God created humankind - every human being - to be God’s family: to share life together in the intimacy of the Trinity’s Household. God had a run-in with a light-fixture a little bigger than mine, and said: When will the humans arrive, those folks we conceived in our own image… it won’t be home til we’re all together.

Think of the complexity of the Creation! Think of centipedes and clouds, dinosaurs and volcanoes…think of stars and planets, think of the monkey that escaped from the Memphis Zoo this weekend!... think of the millions of species of plants, think of the metabolism of every kind of animal… think of how *wonderful* the Creation is; how bewildering in its terrible beauty!

And yet… and yet… for the Creator it is not *home* without us - though all heaven and earth be filled with all the stuff of life, without the ones with the capacity to love God back, to enjoy God forever, the Creation would not be home…

What does all this have to do with Melvin’s question? Well, very few of us actually *do* love God back; so God has chosen to reveal God’s self to some in order that through them, God might be revealed to the world. In the midst of humanity’s heartache and strife, God has ordained some to demonstrate an alternative - *the* alternative of the household of God: where everyone is welcomed and loved, and where it can’t be considered home until everyone has been gathered together.

Out of a deep desire to be united with her children God chooses Abraham and Sarah, and all Israel. But it’s not enough, for Israel eventually forgets to love God back - and so God becomes one of us, to show and teach all humankind “once for all” that God is irresistibly loveable, and that we are God’s beloved children. God chooses some to be the proof of that eternal truth for every time in history…

Well, this is our time in history and God has chosen us. Dear friends, listen to this most beautiful thing: God has set us apart not for our own profit, though the profit is inestimable, but so that humankind might remember its high calling to be the family of God and make with God a home. God has called all persons to participate in the love and perfection and glory of the Divine Life; Indeed, the people of God are chosen, gifted, and set apart for one thing: that the whole world might be saved, “for God is making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20). The people of God are chosen and set apart to stand in the face of Death and reveal a new hope to a dying world, to praise God for his grace, and to demonstrate in the power of this hope that the Creator has *a plan for the fullness of time*.

So Paul tells the Ephesians, and all who hear his words:

“God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, ***to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*** […] In Jesus 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; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.”

We have been called in the power of the Spirit to remind the world that just as God will not make a home without us, so we will not be able to make the Creation a home without God. No matter how much we learn, no matter what we invent, we will only find out what home truly is when we turn ourselves toward to One who made us. God *is* saving planet earth, and all the cosmos with it; and we have been given the privilege and opportunity, at this time -- in this place, to reveal the glory of God’s merciful grace and life-giving love to a world that has forgotten the way home.

In the name of the Creator, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Spirit of Life. Amen.