

11 July 21 Amos 7:7-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29

One of the churches I served had a statement that was put throughout the worship service. They had two services actually – a contemporary and a traditional service. It is a good statement and response, and I thought I would put it throughout this sermon – maybe in the warmth of summer it is a good way to keep our attention up. I am sure you have heard it before.

*God is Good!!! – All the time!!!*

*All the time!!! – God is good!!*

I wonder, do we believe that? Do we hold on to that all the time.

As I look at the readings today, we will be focusing on the reading from Ephesians. I was drawn to it because it starts with a thanksgiving – a blessing, like what we just said. A statement that God is good – all the time. But the other readings will come in to play. Each of them speaks of some horrendous things going on.

Amos is told to tell the people of Israel about upcoming destruction. They were not living as they should – and destruction was coming their way.

John the baptizer confronted Herod about breaking the law of God. What did he get as the reward for doing that? Well, Herod promised his step daughter whatever she wanted – and her mom had her ask for John to be killed. And he was.

*God is good – all the time.*

*All the time – God is good.*

At that moment, did the friends and followers of John believe that?

But then we come across that word that Paul uses, and a word that means something to John's followers – predestined. A key word in the letter to the people of Ephesus.

Oh, how about for us, when things are just not going right?

When I was in a widows group on line, we had a list of stupid things that we each heard from well meaning people – along with responses that either were given or we would have liked to have given, and just did not respond with at that moment.

One woman heard from some people, after her husband died – “well I guess God had a plan for Joe.” She responded with – the New York Yankees had a plan too – didn't work out too well for them. I guess that was not a good year for that team.

Predestined...all that comes your way is predetermined by God. Good, bad, and indifferent. At least that is what so many of us hear when we hear that word – predestined.

Where is God in the midst of the pain? Where is God in the midst of the bees buzzing around you – some of you know what I am referencing there – and hopefully can chuckle. And what, if anything does this have to say?

Oh, there is the next phrase that comes out of everyone's mouth: I am a good person, what did I do to deserve this? Every day in every way, I am getting better and better – and so I exchange this goodness my goodness – with the understanding that I will get good in return.

*God is good – all the time.*

*All the time – God is good.*

But I am too. God has to look at me, and see that I have been so good as well. He has to give me His favor.

This, too is part of who we are. We have this bargain that is going on with God. If I do good – God will make sure that only good happens to me. If I obey the commandments ....if I go to church enough....if I give enough, God will take this and give me the good life.

I know that I have heard that many times when I have listened to various preachers on TV. Send me money they say – do good...and God has to reward you. You will prosper – if only you make the right bargain with your god – and perhaps we could say with the universe.

That again is seen as part of predestination.

Well...maybe God owes me a good life in the future for all that I have done. If I don't get the bargain today – it is in the after life.

Isn't that what God chose me for?

Oh...speaking of chosen...there is the next step that we hear.

This big word in what Paul says in the letter to the Ephesians – Predestined.

On hearing that word, some start rubbing their hands together, and thinking of all their enemies. They are predestined as well – but of course not to the good place. They are predestined elsewhere.

That way of speaking about Predestination is part of American churches thinking. This was the way that some of the Puritans spoke of predestination. God in His heaven is looking at people as they are born.

One, two, three – you have the possibility of being predestined to heaven. All the rest of you are – well you know, predestined to Hell. That is where you are going no matter what. And that way of thinking goes back to another group that was part of the Reformation.

And then doubt enters in – as it did with the Puritans. How do I know I am one of those who are elect? How do I know I am predestined to heaven – and not to hell. That is in God's capricious character. And if I am predestined to hell – well I might as well give up – there is nothing I can do. And if I am predestined to heaven, I have to prove that somehow.

But I want you to look with me at what Paul has to say – and look at this hole we have dug ourselves in to.

*God is good – all the time.*

*All the time – God is good.*

The hole we dig ourselves in to.

We dig ourselves down in doubt – because things don't go the way we want them to. Or we have a dis-ease in life.

We dig ourselves down – because we want to do an exchange with God – our goodness – our good behavior to get up out of the hole – and find ourselves stuck deeper.

We dig ourselves down – seeing a predestination that is hopeless no matter which way we are going.

That hole of our making is being filled – not by us – but by the one that actually predestined us, to pull us out of the hole.

First by saying these are words of assurance. These are words of confidence.

God chose us before the creation of the world. It speaks nothing of a word of condemnation. You are not allowed from this to infer that God predestined people to hell. That isn't the mathematics of logic, but the energy of God's love. The reason that not all who hear the word believe it is not that God has not allowed them to be saved. Instead it is their own fault and rejection.

You – you are chosen by God. Rest in that.

I am the last of five children. One of the things that I was told when I was growing up is that my parents made a conscious decision to have one more child – me. I won't go in to details of why that decision was made – but they made it.

I became that fifth child. Throughout my life, I always knew that, no matter what, that decision was made by them. I was chosen to be their final child.

In this case, they didn't know what I would be like – not even if the child to be born would be a girl or a boy – only that they wanted one more child.

Chosen by them.

This is what God says of you in Christ – I chose you. I didn't chose you as my last child – by I named you to be my child. That is what predestination is – it says God chose you.

*God is good – all the time.*

*All the time – God is good.*

God did not choose you because you were so holy and blameless. That is not what God does.

The first person I can think of who was called “chosen by God” would have to be Abraham. Sometime, take the time to look at his life.

God chose him, and his wife Sarah. After being chosen, he continued to do a whole lot of stuff that did not show him to be blameless and holy. Oh there are some good things they did too. But they were not the best example of living a holy life that I can think of – at least by human standards.

But the one part they – Sarah and Abraham – got right was that they clung to the promise that God made them holy.

And yet – he is called holy and blameless as well. Holy, as in separated out by God.

You want to know why you are holy and blameless? We have a picture of it as I stand before you today. I can tell you – I am not holy and blameless in who I am. That is why each week I need to say the confession of sin before worship.

But like this white robe I have put on – I have put on the holiness of Jesus. Clothed in Christ. He makes me – he makes you Holy. You are now holy.

I thought about this when I was thinking of Joan Fleck and her memorial service yesterday. She had requested that all these clothes in front – the paraments – be white for her funeral. How fitting – she was clothed in Christ – put on His holiness...because of what he did.

We just sang that – Clothed in His righteousness alone...You are holy! You are blameless! You are more than good enough – because Christ in you is! Because Christ covers you!

*God is good – all the time.*

*All the time – God is good.*

A final word...This word predestination. It is to give you confidence. Not in yourself. But Because it is what God has done for you in Christ Jesus.

And for that reason – those that preceded Jesus – who were able to be confident in whose they were because of what God did...they could say AND BELIEVE “God is good...all the time” because they knew who had chosen them

Amen.