

Sermon Draft

Text: Ephesians 1:3–14

Sermon: “Blessed and Loved”

So, let me ask you, how much does God love you? I want you to know that God loves each one of you dearly. The Father loves you so much that he sent his only begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary, to be your Savior. Jesus loves you so much that he willingly shed his blood for you so that your sins might be paid for and you could receive forgiveness of those sins and life eternal through faith in him. The Holy Spirit loves you so much that he comes to you and works through the waters of Baptism and the Word of God to change you from an enemy of God into a lover and disciple of the only God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, St. Paul wrote the words of our sermon text. Paul wrote these words to assure troubled hearts and to show the wonderful wisdom and grace of our God. He teaches us that God loves you dearly and has from all eternity!

Paul wrote: ***“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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will”*** (vs 3–5).

Consider how dearly we are loved by God. St. Paul tells us that the heavenly Father blesses us in Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessing. It is amazing to consider that God loved us so much that he sent his only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in him as their Savior will receive eternal life.

Understand that all of us need forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. Is there a person who can truly say that he or she has never thought an unkind thing, never said an unkind word, and always has acted in ways that were pleasing to God? Even in this season of Christmas, we struggle with selfishness. We are much more willing to be the recipients of gifts than to be the giver of gifts.

Our tempers are expressed more than we like, when holiday guests disrupt our routines or the situations of celebration cause us to be stressed. In short, our sinful self is always ready to show itself in our actions, thoughts, and words. The awful reality is that we all have fallen short of the glory of God. We all earn with our sins the wages of death. The death that I'm talking about is not only physical but, more important, also eternal. Every one of us must confess that she or he has not obeyed the commandments of God perfectly and needs to be forgiven. We all must understand that we are not able to earn our way to heaven. We simply cannot do enough good works to cover over our many sins. In fact, if we try to earn our salvation by way of God's Law, we must obey it perfectly, and not one of us has done that. What are we to do? Who will save us?

The joyous message of Paul is that God, before the creation of the world, before our creation, considered carefully how to save us. And the way that God determined that we were to be saved was in his Son, Jesus Christ. The heavenly Father predestined us to be adopted as his sons so that, through faith in Christ Jesus, we are indeed children of the heavenly Father.

We are heirs of God's kingdom!

Please note that this is not simply a general proclamation of God's grace but rather it is a personal one as well. God loves you. He calls you by name. His plan of salvation is for you personally, even as it is for all the elect of God.

Rejoice in how dearly God loves you!

Jesus, who is God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, loves you so dearly that he willingly became a man. He was born of the Virgin Mary. Thus Jesus was born without sin. And as a man, Jesus lived perfectly under the Law of God so that he might obey it as you and I have not obeyed it. Jesus loves you and me so dearly that he willingly shouldered our sins, in fact the sins of the whole lot of mankind and carried them to the cross of Calvary.

Upon the cross, in obedience to the Law of God, Jesus died. God says that the wages of sin is death and the soul that sins shall surely die. In order to fulfill the Law of God, Jesus allowed himself to be hung on that cross. Jesus died on the cross in order that he might redeem us with his blood shed and his body broken. Jesus once and for all time paid the price of your sins, my sins, and the whole of mankind's sins.

Jesus didn't remain in the grave but rose again on the third day victorious over sin, Satan, and death. He thereby assures us that all has been completed on behalf of our salvation. Paul reminds us that this plan of salvation was in place even before we breathed our first breath.

Jesus and the Father send the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, to work through the Word and Sacraments to call unbelievers into true faith and to sustain them in the true faith. It is God's desire that all people be brought into saving faith. We know this is his will from so many passages that point it out. For example: ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"*** (John 3:16). ***"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people"*** (Titus 2:11). ***"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"*** (1 Timothy 2:3–4). And, ***"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world"*** (1 John 2:2).

Furthermore, St. Paul, in our sermon text, reminds us that the Holy Spirit called each of us to faith, and he, that is, the Holy Spirit, comes and dwells with us. This Holy Spirit changes us by enabling us to have a new heart, mind, desire, and will to do the will of God. In other words, the Holy Spirit leads us to strive to serve God and our neighbor above ourselves. The best way that we can serve our neighbors who are Christians is to encourage them in their faith. The best way that we can serve our unbelieving neighbors is to invite and bring them to church so that they might hear the message of salvation in Christ Jesus.

And when we find that we have fallen and sinned against God's holy will, the same Holy Spirit enables us to repent of our sin and strive once again to walk according to God's will. See how much God loves us dearly. He doesn't leave us without a guarantee of our salvation. The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of our eternal inheritance. He is the one who leads us to true faith and enables us to receive the wonderful blessings of God, blessings which God determined to give us before the creation of the world.

God indeed loves you dearly! In Jesus' name. Amen