

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
Dan Krebill, co-pastor

July 11, 2021  
*Seventh Sunday after Pentecost*  
Ephesians 1:3-14

### Called to Glorify and Enjoy

My friends—sisters and brothers in Christ—after more than 60 weeks, we have finally come full circle and are again able to fully voice our praise and worship in unison audible ways that give full expression of our worship of almighty God. Today is the third consecutive Sunday that we are lifting our voices in speaking and singing our praise. Isn't it wonderful?

Over the 16 months of the pandemic, that unison audible worship was curtailed for the health and safety of our community. But as a faith community we didn't miss a Sunday of offering praise and worship of God in the same spirit but in different and newfangled fashion. We faithfully carried on with what our tradition holds as the most important and essential task that we have as God's creatures—that is the praise and glorification of God in everything we do. Worship and praise are central to everything that we do as Christians. And we stand in a long line of those who have gone before us in the faith who have carried out that task with faithfulness and tenacity.

We have, in our tradition's confessional heritage, a treasure trove of wisdom and insight into what it means to respond to God's gifts to us. One of the distinctives of us Presbyterians is that we are informed by these confessions as a way of keeping us in touch with the foundations of our faith. Later in the service this morning we will hear the vows made by those who we have selected as deacons and elders in our church. The third one of those questions is: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scriptures leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?"

We affirm that these confessions are authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, those in our tradition living in England wrote the Westminster Confession of Faith. For many generations it was this confession that was the centerpiece of our confessional heritage. I'd like to read the very first paragraph of this historic confession:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased. (*Book of Confessions*, 6.001)

Huh?

Would you like me to read that again? (

Don't worry. I won't read it again and I'm not even going to attempt to put that into 21<sup>st</sup> century English.

Thankfully, the framers of this confession realized that if it was going to be incorporated into the lives of everyday believers, it would need to be distilled into something more accessible. And so as a way to teach the faith, the Larger Catechism was written for public exposition from the pulpit, and the Shorter Catechism was written for the education of children.

A catechism is a series of questions and answers that are written so that they can be memorized and recited as a way of retaining the gist or meaning. Both catechisms are grounded in the Westminster Confession itself. And both catechisms get right to the point with the very first question and answer.

The larger catechism begins with: "Q. 1. What is the chief and highest end of man? A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever." (7.111)

The shorter catechism likewise begins with: Q. 1. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. (7.001) It is worth noting that it is this first question of the shorter catechism that has become one that is frequently referenced and quoted.

It is worth noting that in both of these catechisms the beginning of our life with God is to glorify God and to enjoy God forever. Did you hear those two verbs? Glorify and enjoy.

Now those of you who have been listening to me in this pulpit and in educational settings over these last 24+ years will know that I like to point out what is not mentioned as much, or maybe even sometimes more, than what is mentioned in a passage of scripture, or in this case in these catechisms. Because what is mentioned is often in contrast or in contradistinction toward which we otherwise might be inclined.

Our chief end is to glorify and enjoy—glorify God and enjoy God. It does not say that our chief end is to do good deeds so as to earn God's favor. It does not say that our chief end is to behave ourselves so as to avoid God's punishment. There is nothing transactional in these statements. Rather than a transaction in which we act in a certain way or we do certain things and we receive something in return—in the case of this matter—God's favor or God's blessings or God's grace. No, what is being proffered here is relational rather than transactional. Because of what God has done, because of how God has blessed us, because of God's grace already freely bestowed on us, we respond with gratitude and thanksgiving. And just how do we show this gratitude and thanksgiving? By glorifying—glorifying God; and by enjoying—enjoying God forever.

After having looked to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians for the first part of the summer, today we turn to another of his letters that will be our focus for the next several weeks. The letter to the Ephesians begins with this statement that we read this morning in which the grace of God is proclaimed and stated in such clear fashion that it is hard to miss what is being said.

Again, in just 2 of these verses: "In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having all been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory." (Eph.1:11-12) There is that word glory—as in glorify.

There couldn't be a clearer statement that it is through God's action that we are put right with God. It is not our work. It is not our good deeds. It is not our correct behavior. It is not our right belief. It is God's work that saves us. That is what grace is all about.

In the world in which we live—in which we are led to believe that we get what we deserve, that we earn what we have, that if we work hard, we'll be rewarded—it's no wonder that we take this same thinking into our religious world. But that is where we get ourselves all turned inside out when it comes to God's grace. One of the best and most straightforward definitions of grace is unmerited favor. Unmerited favor. We can understand that in at least two ways.

The first is that we don't get what we deserve. Because if the truth be told, if we got what we deserved, it certainly wouldn't be God's favor. That is why we regularly confess our sin, our unfaithfulness, our failure to do the things we ought to do as well as the our doing the very things we ought not to do.

The second way to understand grace as unmerited favor is that we get what we don't deserve. This is the wonder of grace, in that God looks at us and rather than meting out consequences, God delivers the free gift of forgiveness and mercy—in a word, grace.

Another one of the confessions that came into our church's heritage is The Confession of 1967. This statement was fashioned in a time in our nation when there were fractures of all kinds in the forefront—the civil rights movement, nuclear proliferation and Cold War, the beginnings of the environmental movement, the so called sexual revolution—all calling for attention. The overarching theme of the Confession of 1967 is that through the grace of God shown in and through Jesus, all things are being reconciled by God.

One of the most powerfully descriptive statements speaking of God's grace—God's unmerited favor bestowed on us—is this one from the Confession of 1967:

The same Jesus Christ is the judge of all people. His judgment discloses the ultimate seriousness of life and gives promise of God's final victory over the power of sin and death. To receive life from the risen Lord is to have life eternal; to refuse life from him is to choose the death which is separation from God. All who put their trust in Christ face divine judgment without fear, for the judge is their redeemer. (9.11)

It is that last sentence that describes God's stunningly amazing grace. "All who put their trust in Christ face divine judgment without fear, for the judge is their redeemer." What this means is that when it's all said and done, when the time comes for God to look at and evaluate us, what God sees—what God chooses to see—is not the reality of our lives for better or for worst, but God sees Jesus and his perfect life given for us to live. That's what it means for Jesus to be our redeemer. Jesus stands in our place before the judgement and in so doing redeems us.

Now, if ever there was a case to be made for us to glorify God and to enjoy God forever, it is this, that in Christ we are made new and whole and fully redeemed before God who creates us, God who loves us, and God who sustains us.