

“You are loved unconditionally!” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
July 15, 2018, Eighth Sunday after Pentecost  
Ephesians 1:3-14, Psalm 24

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Take out your bulletin and look at the call to worship, Psalm 24. Let’s read the first line together. **The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.** In other words, the psalmist is saying that the earth belongs to God and that God created it. The psalmist is saying those of us who live on this earth belong to God because God created us. God is the source of all life – plant, animal, human – all life.

Do you believe the psalmist words to be true? From our reading today in Ephesians, we might wonder if Paul questioned if the Ephesians believed that God had created the world and all that was in it. And that God was concerned about those God created.

When you heard me read today’s scripture you may have wondered if Paul wrote these verses. They are so positive. Yes, the sentences are long and dense, like Paul writes, but there’s something different here. Paul goes overboard in the use of superlatives. He uses words like blessed in Christ, chosen, blameless, adoption, glorious grace freely bestowed, forgiveness. These verses are probably among some of the most positive words Paul penned.

So, let’s delve into these verses knowing that these are positive encouraging words. If you wonder if God created you and me and the world, if you’re wondering if God loves you, then Paul provides words that will encourage you to accept that truth. God does love you. In fact, Paul says that God has loved you before the foundation of the world was laid. That’s pretty amazing love! To know that God loved you before you were born or before you were formed in your mother’s womb.

I had coffee with a friend last week who sponsors a number of people in AA, Alcoholics Anonymous. He was telling me about one of the guys he is working with that had been brought up in a religion where God was a wrathful God, a God who would punish you for every little thing you did that wasn’t according to the Law. This person couldn’t even imagine the God could be loving and forgiving. This guy needed to read these words from Paul!

We don’t need to go to a church that tells us God is a vengeful God and we’re never good enough in God’s eyes. We live in a society that reinforces this negative thinking about ourselves. Advertising tells us we’re never good enough. We need this or that product or need to do this or that and then we’ll be accepted, loved. Society stresses that we need to be better, to strive for more. But that’s not the God I serve or the God that Paul is talking about in these scriptures. Paul states we have redemption, forgiveness

according to the riches of God's Grace that God lavishes on us. If we mess up, God forgives us and still loves us.

That sounds to me like God loves the creatures God created?

Paul goes on to say that God destined us for adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ. I spoke of this with the children this morning. But the message applies to adults as well. God loves us so much that God adopts us into God's family. We are a part of God's family. Please note that Paul is not talking about the future, but about right now. We are adopted through Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection.

If that 's not acceptance and love, I don't know what else to say.

Paul also discusses God's relationship to the world. God's love extends to all creation. God will, in the fullness of time, gather up all things in him. God has not deserted the world. God cares for all of God's creation.

When we say all of creation, that means all creation. There may be those who think a group, or a person is not worthy of God's love or is less than one group or another. Unfortunately, that type of thinking is all too prevalent in our world today. That's not what this scripture says. All will be gathered to God. You know the old joke about being in heaven and meeting all those people you didn't think would be there! I'm sure that will be true. God loves all of God's creation – and so should we.

Lest you think this scripture is about you and me as individuals, that it's about a personal relationship with God, in the Greek the pronouns are plural. Paul is talking about the community being adopted, about God loving the community, everyone. The adoption is about the family, not the individual. For our self-centered world, that is difficult to accept and understand. We must remember that we are called by our baptism into community, not individualism. It's not just about ME and MY calling, but about US and OUR calling to service. (Charles King, email. Homiletics Online, 1/4/2009)

God created the world and all that is in it. And God continues to care for God's creation and all those who live in it. Paul fully believed that God knew us before the beginning of time, that we are cared for by God, and that we have been adopted by God as children of God. God has a lot of love for God's creation – for you and for me, for this church family, for the community, for the world.

Forget about what the world tells us about not being good enough and that you need this product or that service. God's love is all you need!

One final note about this scripture. Yes, it's exuberant. Yes, it's about God's love. Is there something missing? I hesitate to mention this, but some folks may say that Paul misses that we need to do something in response to that love. When I read these words, did you hear anything except that God loves you and has showed you how much God

loves you in the life of Christ? I didn't see anything in this scripture that says we have any obligation to God beyond accepting God's love for us.

Chuck Swindoll is a well-known author and preacher. He describes a moment of crisis in his life. He was speaking at a pastor's conference. By any measure it was successful. Participants begged him to speak longer and were very engaged. But when he was alone in his room at the end of each day he felt an emptiness and frustration.

Sensing God was wanting to do something in his life Chuck called four trusted friends. "I want you to listen to my life story and see if anything stands out to you." And so, the four friends and Chuck Swindoll gathered. Beginning with his earliest memory Chuck poured out his life story.

When he had finished, one of the friends asked him a few questions and then said, "Chuck, I want you to put your head on the table and close your eyes." Chuck put his head on the table and closed his eyes.

"Now I want you to imagine your father is holding you in his arms. What do you feel?"

Almost instantly Chuck began to cry. For thirty minutes he cried his eyes out. You see Chuck's father had died when Chuck was seven months old. And as he closed his eyes what he felt was pure unconditional love.

What Chuck also realized that day was that while he had preached many times about God's great love he had never made that personal. With his head on the table that day he really felt, for the first time, that God loved him, that his heavenly father loved him deeply, richly and unconditionally.

That's what God's grace is. It's not conditional. Otherwise, we fall into living with rules and regulations. God loves you as you are not for what you can do for God.

God thinks you are precious. And I'm absolutely convinced that God loves each of us beyond our imagination. Enjoy that love!