

'Blessings in Christ' – 12th July 2020

Dear Friends,

Greetings on this sixth Sunday after Pentecost.

Here we are in the middle of the summer season, and I had a minor panic yesterday evening when I went to our local Sainsbury's in Paignton; the shelves were virtually bare!! At first, I thought the 'panic-buyers' had returned in full force, but I took a second guess and realised it may have been the holiday makers stocking up on supplies – which the Checkout Operator confirmed!

Having grown up in Dartmouth, every summer season we were blessed with holiday makers, tourists, day-trippers from the hotels and guest houses in Torquay and not to mention second home owners. Each year they would descend upon the town clogging up streets, getting in the way of the traffic by walking in the middle of the road and buying up everything in the shops. The town would go from its native population of approximately 6000 up to 200,000 people a day. I certainly didn't see them as blessing!! But you know, I was wrong, because all the day trippers, tourists, holiday makers and second home owners brought in a lot of money and therefore boosting the local economy – which is a real blessing to all those reliant on the summer trade.

Hidden blessings – it's easy to be surrounded by blessings and not see them.

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary describes a blessing as "*...a thing conducive to happiness or welfare*".

For many, our parents or care givers may have bestowed upon us many 'hidden' blessings as we were growing up – setting rules or boundaries that we may have not liked, but were there for our protection and general welfare.

In our reading for today, which is taken from Ephesians 1:3-14, the Apostle Paul is commenting on the 'heavenly blessings' available to all who are saved through Jesus Christ.

In verse 7, we see the first blessing Paul describes, which is the redemption through the blood of Christ and the forgiveness of all sins. Looking back to the book of Genesis, we read about the original sin in Chapter 3, where Adam and Eve turned their backs on God by deciding to go their own way. Tempted by the crafty snake, Eve eats fruit from the forbidden tree in order to gain wisdom, and Adam does the same. This action angers God and puts a divide between Him and Adam and Eve ushering in a new kingdom that is not conducive to the welfare of humankind's welfare, both spiritually and physically.

Moving forward thousands of years, God gives humankind a new opportunity to reconnect with Him through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul knows this and is emphatically telling the church in Ephesus that they have this exciting new opportunity for blessings in Christ. This is common theme throughout the book of Ephesians; Paul is telling the church in Ephesus of God's plan to end all that divides humankind i.e. social classes, cultures, nations and religions and that Jesus is the unifying force through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The second blessing described by Paul in verse 11 focuses on inheritance. Inheritance can be an investment in the next generation as parents pass wealth and resources from one generation to the next. Inheritance can be a blessing as it brings financial security and a better lifestyle or wellbeing. As with ancient Greek culture, inheritance was of great importance, most people were in the same trade as their parents and had little or no upward mobility regarding careers. A wealthy inheritance was greatly desired as it brought security in employment and life chances. Paul draws on this as a parallel, that followers of Christ's inheritance will become a child of God; this gives Christians the right to expect an inheritance and gain eternity in the House of the Lord, dwelling in His righteousness for all time. The blessing of eternal life.

The third blessing is described in verses 13 and 14 where Paul says: *When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.* A 'seal' was a mark indicating a letter or scroll was closed, or completed. When a king or dignitary wanted to show an identifying mark with a letter, he would seal it with a resin imprint of his ring. Paul is saying to the believers in Ephesus that when they make the decision to follow Jesus, they are sealed by the Holy Spirit. When Jesus left, He tells His Disciples (John 14:26): *"...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."* The blessing of

the Holy Spirit brings an abundance of fruits and gifts – healing, wisdom, peace, love and joy... All of which can be life changing! Paul talks about the Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 and the gifts can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.

It's easy to let God's blessings fall into the background of life as we go about our daily business. But remember something, that the blessings are there for the taking – for those who believe in Christ will inherit a richness of blessings of being close with God the Father and a place in His Kingdom – and don't forget those wonderful gifts and fruits which can be bestowed upon us in an instant! These bring a real happiness and are conducive to our spiritual welfare.

The past few months may have been absent of blessings for many, but now is the time to reconnect with those blessings in Christ. And it can all start or be rekindled with a simple prayer...

A prayer for this sixth Sunday after Pentecost:

Lord Jesus, you are the way, the truth and the life – and you tell us that no one comes to the Father except through you.

We pray for the richest blessings upon us; that you grant your inheritance of closeness with God the Father and an eternity in your Kingdom. We ask that the mighty power of your Holy Spirit descends and refreshes and restores our strength.

At this time, we remember those who may not be feeling blessed; those who have lost hope, face injustice or feel disconnected from society – we pray that they may know blessings of peace, love and your grace.

Finally, we thank you Heavenly Father for all that you have done and will do. Grant us your peace and help us to bring wonderful blessings to those around.

These prayers we offer in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who reconciled all on Earth as in Heaven. Amen.

Bless you all - and keep the faith.

Jonathan Oliverio