

July 12, 2009  
Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

“I will...”

Text: Ephesians 1:3-14

Mike and I had a discussion about the Hymn of Praise that we sang just a little while ago. To be totally honest, I was kind of down on it because of the way the words struck me. They struck me as kind of arrogant, because there is so much of the word “I” in there. “I will worship..., I will praise You..., I will seek You..., I will follow..., I will bow down...,” etcetera, etcetera. And after all that talk about “I”, the final line of the chorus just kind of rubbed me wrong. We sang, “You alone are worthy of my praise,” and it struck me as if I was singing that *my praise* was such a wonderful thing that God was lucky to get it.

However, I also realize that as a born and bred diaper Lutheran who has been to that strange and scholarly land know as seminary, I tend to hop on the theological catapult and launch myself way beyond what the author of this hymn intended to say or where folks singing the song are going with it in their hearts. So if when I criticized the song you were thinking, “Gee Whiz pastor, take a pill,” I probably deserved that.

But there are people and there are churches out there that do believe that to some measure their praise and worship and good things they do are a valuable gift that they are giving up to God—because they have agreed out of their own free will to be God’s child. We call it decision theology and it happens when we throw the word “I” into the formula of God’s plan of salvation. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose again to eternal life so that we can rise with Him...but **I** have to make a decision for Christ. **I** must accept Him as my personal Savior. Yes, Jesus did the vast majority of it, 99.9 percent, but **I** have a little bit of glory and righteousness to throw into the mix and make it really work!

Paul is pretty clear whose decision it was that we be saved as he opens his letter to the church at Ephesus; “*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 as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*”

We were predestined to be believing children of God before we were born, before even the world was created. We did not and do not play any part in this decision of God. Paul makes very clear that our salvation, all of it, was completely accomplished by God and done so only in the manner He chose; through His Son Jesus Christ.

“*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*”

Whenever we start talking about predestination it raises a lot of questions, the most often asked being “Why are some chosen and not others?” Some have tried to answer this question by saying that it is because of our good works that we are saved, those who don’t do good are lost. Others say it is because someone chooses to accept Christ as their savior that they are saved. Those who aren’t willing to make that decision for their lives are lost.

Paul doesn’t give a reason why God does what he does. It isn’t like the evacuation of the Titanic when those saved were saved on the basis of some earthly criteria like women and children first. It isn’t like on the playground picking teams for kickball and those who were

blessed with the ability to perform got chosen first. We hear Romans 3:23 again and again because it is a truth we should never forget; *“For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”* None of us deserve this blessing. None of us have done something to earn this blessing. None of us can understand the ‘why me?’ of this blessing.

All we can be sure of is that God has revealed His will for us through Jesus Christ. We know Jesus died for our sins and rose for our salvation. The mystery of “why” remains, but His will for us is clear—we are saved through the blood of Christ, and being saved has fantastic implications.

*“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”*

That’s it. You were chosen by God to be saved through Christ and the deal has been sealed through the gift of God’s Holy Spirit by which you are enabled to believe the Gospel truth of Christ. It’s all God. It’s not you. There is no “I did it” anywhere in the formula of God salvation. We are chosen and we are given to. The active gift of God is poured into us. We are the passive receiver of God’s grace and blessing.

We know, believe and trust in this truth. But in our sins we are tempted to take the passiveness too far. We have been adopted out of slavery to sin and into the inheritance of sons and daughters of the living, holy and almighty God. But while we are still saint and sinner all at once here on earth, a big part of us wants to stay passive and not act on the great gift we’ve received, the change God has accomplished in us through Christ. This temptation to passivity and sin is what our fight is against in this life. What God has done in and to us through Christ calls for a reaction, a response, a life of service to our King and Lord. We are passive in the reception of grace and forgiveness and holiness, but the life that follows is one of living out the change the blood of Christ has accomplished in us.

In this understanding our hymn of praise takes on a whole new and proper meaning. We can sing “I will worship and praise with all of my heart and strength” because the heart and strength to do so has been created in us by God through Christ. We can sing “I will seek and follow and trust” because the knowledge of the truth has given us the desire to do so through the Holy Spirit. We can sing “I will bow down and lift my eyes to Your throne” because we realize the blood of Christ alone has washed us clean and pure and able to come into the presence of Holy God. We can sing this song also as a battle hymn of what we aspire to do every day of our lives as we go about our daily roles and tasks in life because we are basking in the guarantee of an eternal inheritance under God.

We can sing, “You alone are worthy of my praise,” because we know that it is God who has perfected us so that our praise is worthy to come before Him. It isn’t anything of us. I mean really, I’ve heard some of us sing, and we really need the perfecting of God and we know that He surely does it.

We can say “I” do this for God, but only as a reaction of what God has done for us that changed us into His pure and holy children; His adopted sons and daughters of righteousness. Now in our gifted new reality, let’s not be passive. Let’s say “I will worship, I will praise, I will seek, I will follow, I will bow down, I will serve, I will trust,” and let’s do it.