

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
July 11, 2021

Greetings brothers and sisters in Christ.

Worship News

Worship is now in the sanctuary beginning at 9:30 (summer hours).

Procedures and Requirements for In-Door Worship

- Masks and social distancing required at all times while in the building
- Sign in on sign-up sheets that will be on a podium as you enter the Gathering Area
- Pick up your bulletin and communion kit at the table in the Gathering Area
- Place your offering in the offering plate at the table in the Gathering Area
- Sit only in designated seating places (if you are sitting with more than two people, please sit on the sides)
- Greet and visit with people before or after worship outside
- The windows will be open and the large ceiling fan will be on to move the air instead of the air conditioning, so please dress accordingly
- The service will be on-line for those not yet comfortable being inside.
 - In order to not overload the internet, please either power down your phones or put them on Airplane Mode.
 - Also, so that the people who are joining us on-line can hear the congregational responses and announcements, a worship leader/reader will lead the congregational responses and all announcements must be made at the pulpit.

The In-Person Worship committee will meet on Monday, July 19th to review these requirements and propose updated procedures for worship that the Church Council will address at their July 20th meeting.

175th Celebration Worship and Picnic – August 15th at 10:00 a.m.

In honor of our ministry together with Good Shepherd UCC, we will be having a joint worship service followed by a picnic with a catered lunch at Jim Dietrich park on August 15th at 10:00 a.m. Hope to see you there.

Church Directory – JoAnne has been updating our current church directory and will be providing updated hard copies of the directory later this month. If your contact information has changed in the last 5 years, please forward that information to JoAnne either by email at GSELC4201@gmail.com or by calling her on the phone at 610-926-4201.

Worship Leaders – We are in need of people to help lead worship by reading both the congregational responses and the lessons. Please let Pastor Denise know if you are willing to volunteer.

If you have prayer requests, please send them to me so that I can include them in my weekly newsletters.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Denise

Home Phone 610-750-6432

Cell/Text Phone 610-858-8187

Ephesians 1:1-14

1 ¹⁻² I, Paul, am under God's plan as an apostle, a special agent of Christ Jesus, writing to you faithful believers in Ephesus. I greet you with the grace and peace poured into our lives by God our Father and our Master, Jesus Christ.

³⁻⁶ How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

⁷⁻¹⁰ Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. *Abundantly* free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we

could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.

¹¹⁻¹² It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.

¹³⁻¹⁴ It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free - signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This down payment from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father
and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN.

This morning, we will begin a four part sermon series from Paul's letter to the mission church in the city of Ephesus, which is located on the Aegean Sea on what is now Turkey.

Due to its strategic location and its resources, the city of Ephesus was considered to be one of the jewels of Asia Minor and of vast importance to the Roman Empire.

Because of its accessibility by sea, it was also a strategic military location.

The combination of its favorable location for trading and its military importance, resulted in a city with a thriving economy and a city that was a

natural "melting pot" of people with different ethnic backgrounds, different values and different faith practices.

Ephesians is a letter providing advice and insight to this fledgling church about faithful living in the midst of diversity.

Advice and insight that is pertinent to us today as our communities, our schools and our churches are becoming more and more diverse. We find ourselves no longer living in communities that share a common ethnic background, or a set of common values and beliefs, or even in many cases a common language.

In this morning's text, the author of this letter challenges the people of Ephesus to see diversity not as a challenge or a struggle, but as strength to make our communities resilient and vital that has been part of God's plan from the very beginning.

For as the author states, God has planned from the beginning to adopt all of us into God's family, where we are to live together in peace and harmony.

And our differences are God's way of strengthening the community, as we each contribute our own personal gifts, ideas and opinions as we work together to accomplish the work that God has called us to do.

And as the author who is a Jew, who is writing to a largely Gentile audience states: that in Christ God has "made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that he names as the hostility between

us"

In this morning text, the author begins the letter by thanking and praising God for adopting us all into God's family with all the rights, the blessings as well as the challenges and the responsibilities of being a family member.

He writes "God chose us" to be holy and blameless, and God has destined us for adoption into God's family as God's children.

We have been destined for adoption into God's family, where God will bring together all the different ethnic groups and cultures into one family.

As adoption is quite common in this day and age. So too, adoption was also quite common in the first century.

Among the elite it served the important function of allowing for an

heir if one had no children, or if one's children died.

The adopted person (who could be a child or an adult) acquired the social status of their parents in the same way a biological child would have.

The adopted child benefitted from the social and political connections of their parents. They also inherited their parents' wealth, when their parents died.

Similarly, adoption for us into God's family through Christ, provides us with the blessings of God's unconditional love, the blessings of God's never-ending mercy and the blessings of God's abundant grace both now and throughout eternity.

However, the adoption that the author of this letter is talking about is not about the adoption of an individual but the adoption of a people, who have

come together as a faith community.

And these communities, unlike the descendants of Abraham the first faith community that God had adopted, these new communities of faith that God is adopting are united not in their lineage.

But, these new faith communities are united in their belief in what God has done for them through the faithfulness and obedience of Christ.

These new communities are a diverse group of people, who as contemporary author Rachel Held Evans states are "not a group of people who [necessarily] believe all the same things; ... [but] a group of people [who are] caught up in the same story, with Jesus at the center.

And not only have these communities been caught up in the same story of what God has done for us through the

life, death and resurrection of Christ.

But, we have become part of the story because we have been commissioned by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to go out and share this story so that all those who hear may also be caught up in this story.

The adoption of God's people is part God's plan to reconcile God's people with one another and to restore God's kingdom here on Earth, not just in the future but now as with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, God has defeated death and God's reign has begun.

The faith community of Ephesus, as well as our faith community here at Good Shepherd have received a variety of spiritual blessings so that we can do the work of God's kingdom here and now.

And our strength and our vitality as a community of faith comes not because we are alike, but because we are different, which allows us to accomplish much more than we could ever accomplish alone.

When we work together, we build relationships that allows us to celebrate instead of fear those who hear things and see things differently.

When we work together, we can eliminate the injustice and the bullying that people are subjected to - day in and day out.

When we work together, we can begin to hear with new ears and see with new eyes.

We have all been adopted into the family of God, where we are loved, where we are forgiven, where we are strengthened, where we are challenged and where we are empowered to do

the work of bringing about the kingdom of God here on earth.

So that now, we as the faith community of Good Shepherd Lutheran, who have been named and claimed into God's family, who have been blessed with the gift of diversity, and who have been empowered by

God's Holy Spirit to do the work of the kingdom, and be the blessing to all people, which is what God created us to be.

AMEN

Blessing

May
The love of God,
The light of Christ,
And the joy of the Holy Spirit
Abide with you on this day
and forever more.

AMEN