

## Our Inheritance

II Samuel 6: 1-19 Ephesians 1: 3-14

Imagine for a moment you have just received word that you are the sole heir to a sizeable financial estate. Now it seems you would be able to live a life of your dreams without worrying financially about a thing. You would be able to be as generous as you wished to others around you. After you got over the shock of it all, imagine what your feelings would be. Would you say, "Why me?" or "What did I do to deserve this inheritance?"

In the movie/play "Little Orphan Annie" - we find Annie, after having lived on the streets or in an orphanage, suddenly finds that she has a grandfather and a rich one at that. She is obviously filled with joy- not necessarily because she is now rich, but because she now has family- an inheritance.

Our Scriptures for this morning speak of inheritances of two sorts- one the ark of God- a physical reminder to the wandering Israelite people of God's presence with them and secondly, the writer of Ephesians speaking of the inheritance received from a direct relationship with God- an inheritance not seen with the eyes, but can received none the less.

First of all, a bit of history about the ark. If you were to read from I Samuel chapters 4-7, you would find more details of the journey of the ark- this visible sign of Israelite inheritance. The ark was a treasured symbol to the Israelites and they carried it carefully all during their wilderness travels. When they became a settled people, the ark was deposited in the shrine at Shiloh. One time they took it out of Shiloh and carried it with them at the head of their army when they marched against the Philistines- thinking it would bring them success in their battle. However, they were defeated and the ark went into captivity. Subsequently, the Philistines discover the ark is like a bit of radioactive waste. Strange things began to happen- idols mysteriously fall over and break, tumors develop, people die. It seems God cannot be taken captive and reigns supreme even in defeat. One day the Israelites look up and find the ark coming toward them in a cart drawn by milk cows. Eventually, the ark ends up in the house of Abinadab- David's brother and Abinadab's son was consecrated to have charge of the ark. It remained with Abinadab for about twenty years.

In II Samuel, we find the account of David, now king of both Judah and Israel, attempting to finalize Jerusalem becoming the political, military and now the spiritual center of his kingdom. We do not find that God instructed David to bring the ark to Jerusalem, but he takes steps to do so. David's determination to move the ark to Jerusalem was done with great festivity and celebration.

The verses of II Samuel 6 Scripture for this morning pick up the account of the ark's journey on the way to Jerusalem. As it traveled, one of Abinadab's sons (Uzzah) was guiding the wagon carrying the ark. At one point, he reaches out to steady the ark to keep it from falling and is struck dead since he was not one of those who were privileged to touch it. This -1-

sudden death frightens and angers David and he places the ark in the house of Obed-edem. Scripture records that the house of Obed-edem was blessed during the three months the ark was in his care.

Our lectionary picks up at a point where David becomes aware that Obed-edem has been blessed and David once again decides to bring the ark to Jerusalem. This is done with great pomp and celebration- with David dancing in the streets. David has to deal with his wife's displeasure as a result of his display of joy. Our lectionary reading closes with an account of the celebration and David's blessing and feeding all the people.

Later Solomon, David's son, built a temple around the ark which eventually was destroyed in 586BC when the Chaldeans destroyed Jerusalem and mention of the ark disappeared from Scriptural history. One last mention of it is found in the book of Revelation where John sees the ark in a dream.

We get a sense through all the historical account, that God is very much in charge- even when it doesn't appear that David is consulting God. God's promise of their inheritance is the one constant that remains regardless of the people's actions- God's promise, proof of God's presence and God is in charge. We could spend many hours walking through the Scriptural account of the ark and the role God, through it, played in the history of Israel and Judah.

Interestingly, the lectionary Scripture for this morning from the New Testament- the first chapter of Ephesians continues the focus of God's inheritance- not through a visible ark but the pledge of a continued inheritance "toward redemption as God's own people" as Ephesians puts it.

The first verse of the Epistle of Ephesians states clearly that Paul is the author. It is different from Paul's other letters in that it appears more generally addressed to the churches of Paul's third missionary journey. Also, unlike Paul's other writings, Ephesians does not address any particular error or heresy. Paul writes so that his readers might better understand the dimensions of God's eternal purpose, God's grace and the high goals God has for the church.

William Barclay called the Epistle of Ephesians, "Paul's supreme letter." Barclay saw it as Paul's vision for the church and the world. Verse 10 of this first chapter states God's great dream for all people; "to gather up all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth." Ephesians is a relatively short letter and as we skim through it, Barclay's calling it "Paul's supreme letter" becomes clear. In preparing for this morning, I did that brief reading of the entire book and found every chapter contains familiar words and phrases we have heard often. It made me realize that while we use portions of scripture each Sunday or in our time of Bible Study, there is real value in the perspective gained through looking at the book as a whole. The Epistle of Ephesians, especially, is short enough to more easily be able to do that. As a result, this morning's message shifted from just a few verses from the first chapter -2-

to sharing some of what I found in the entire Epistle- some six short chapters of as Barclay called it, "Paul's supreme letter."

The Epistle contains two emphasis- a doctrinal focus or laying out the basic doctrine of spiritual beliefs and secondly, the practical focus of living out that doctrine in daily life.

The first three chapters of Ephesians contain the doctrinal focus- but don't miss the inheritance theme. We find such familiar words and phrases as: Chapter 1 verse 4, "...he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world...He destined us for adoption as his children..." Verse 11, "In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the promise..." Chapter 2 verses 4 & 5, "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved-...." Chapter 3 closes with verses 20 & 21, "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever." The doctrines of being chosen, predestination (or chosen from the beginning of time), saved by grace, God's power in our lives are laid out.

Chapters 4 through 6 of Ephesians contain the practical ways to live out that doctrine. In those chapters, we find such familiar words and phrases as: Chapter 4 begins, "I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." Words often used at times in the church for ordination and/or installations. Chapter 5 begins with the words, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...." and continues with the warning to avoid pagan ways, "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light...." Verses 19 & 20 of Chapter 5, "as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Chapter 5 concludes with the basics of the Christian household- husbands and wives, verse 21, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." Verse 31, the familiar words often used at weddings- "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Chapter 6, verse 1 has words for children and parents- "Children, obey your parents in the lord, for this is right." Verses 5-9 lays out a proper relationship between slaves and masters. Chapter 6 gives direction to, "Put on the whole armor of God...Take up the whole armor of God... (breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword). Verse 18 & 19- emphasizes prayer. The chapter and the Epistle closes with a benediction- "Peace be to the whole -3-

community and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When Paul wrote this letter of Ephesians from a prison cell, he wanted his friends in those little house churches to capture a vision. He wanted them to see that in the middle of a fractured and divided world, there would be a place where all could come despite their very real differences. It would be a place of safety and wholeness for all as a promised inheritance from God.

In addition to noting the many familiar spiritual references in the entire Epistle of Ephesians we can also see an interesting pattern in this first chapter- three sections or stanzas- as if it were a song or poem: The first few verses of Ephesians 1- verses 3-6 can be seen as a hymn to God- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” Verses 7-10 move from the vertical to the horizontal- from God to the world- “In him we have redemption....forgiveness of our trespasses...” In verses 11-14 in this first chapter, the hymn becoming more personal- “In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance...”

All of Scripture relates for us God’s hand in the lives of God’s people. As God leads the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, the ark was a visible symbol of God’s presence with them- guiding and caring for them. As they became a more settled people, having reached the Promised Land, the ark continued to be a central, visible symbol that God was in the midst of them. The Old Testament often records the direct communication between God and leadership such as Moses on through the prophets. This communication is then passed along to the people.

The New Testament- with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ- moves beyond the visible symbol of God’s inheritance and becomes an internal, personal connection with God. The Ephesians passage reminds us that we have been adopted as children of God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are to be examples and disciples of Christ in this world. In receiving this unearned, undeserved inheritance from God, we are to live our lives in gratitude, dedicated to sharing that same good news with the world around us.

Our inheritance from God is far greater than all the earthly goods we might inherit. Our inheritance is far greater than Little Orphan Annie’s gaining a human family. Our inheritance is so far beyond our scope of understanding that it is indescribable. What is our response to this kind of inheritance? Do we forget the enormity of this inheritance? Do we HO HUM our way through life? Do we grumble and see only the bad and negative in life? Or do we ask what we did to deserve such a gift and make sure our gratitude is visible in our daily lives? Do we shout our joy from the house tops and share the wonders of salvation in Jesus Christ in word and action? We might even dance for joy as did King David.