

Ephesians 1: 3-14 – God of Past, Present and Future

Prayer

Well, that's been some journey over the last few weeks – Archbishop of Canterbury rolling in and now the Vicar rolling out. The vacancy it is – not the most encouraging of words – vacancy, emptiness, but better than *interregnum* – between the rules, the reigns – that's not a model of ministry I'd like to encourage – a Vicar to come and reign over us. No, vacancy will do, but maybe less of the emptiness and more potential, opportunity. Easy in theory, but if we are feeling a little uncertain, flat this morning, I think that is perfectly understandable. We are starting today a new series on Ephesians, and here's some homework for us all – how about reading through this letter of Paul to the Ephesians over the coming week – a chapter a day. I know there are seven days in the week and only six chapters of Ephesians but we're all human and there's a day for when we forget. And if we do this every week when we preach on Ephesians, I am sure we will all get to know and love this wonderful letter.

I think we can safely say that Paul enjoyed writing this letter, certainly the first chapter. Our reading covered verses 3-14 of chapter one, and in the original Greek it's one long sentence. Paul was getting carried away with enthusiasm – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ...* great start on which he piles all these thoughts of how great is our God. And there's one theme in these verses that can encourage us at the start of our vacancy journey – that God is Lord of the past, the present and the future, Lord of our past, our present and our future. We find that in verse 4 – *he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world...* It's mind-boggling that before we ever existed, before the world, before the universe, God knew us and loved us and chose us. His love is from eternity and his love is for eternity. He chose us so that one day we would freely choose to love him and follow him and live for his glory.

He is Lord of the past because in Jesus God has entered our human history to do something for us that we could not do for ourselves. In verse 7 we see the little phrase *through his blood*. That points to the story of the cross, the story of the Jesus who died for us.

He is Lord of the present, Lord of now. Paul singles out the news that we can know Jesus Christ for ourselves, and according to verse 7 to know Jesus means to know redemption, forgiveness and his grace, *lavished on us* – we find in verse 8. We have, because we have been given, a new identity as God's children in Jesus – *adopted as his children* – verse 5. Out of his own freedom God has chosen to forgive us. Jesus came to find us and bring us back to the Father.

Let's think about the Lord of the past and the present. We know how we can be hobbled by the past. We can carry the hurts that we have caused to other people, things we have said that we can't unsay, things that we prefer not to remember. We can also carry hurts that we have received, embittered even, and memories keep coming back and fuelling the fire. It is so hard to let go and move on. But the Lord knows, he sees our past, he knows where we are now, and his word to us is – that is over, that is forgiven, you are set free, you can go in peace.

He is also Lord of the future, Lord of our future, and Paul emphasises this in the first chapter. Verse 10 tells us that he has a *plan for the fullness of time*. Sometimes people, maybe we, say *I don't know what things are coming to...* We don't need to look very hard to see all the challenges to saying that he is Lord of the present – on the big scale, there's Gaza and Ukraine, nearer to home and in our families – you don't need me to go through everything that makes it hard to say that Jesus is Lord.

But he is and he has not finished yet. He will gather all things together and resolve all the loose ends of time. We do not have the complete picture. Paul invites us to trust God for the future – to know that our future is secure, because it has been secured by Christ. Now if you were feeling particularly grumpy this morning – hard to imagine but... - you might be thinking – *ha, we always come down to an irrational leap of faith – pie in the sky when we die*. But neither Paul nor Jesus nor anyone else really is actually inviting you to a blind leap of faith. We are invited to believe that God is Lord of the future, because believing that is entirely consistent with what we know of God in the past and the present. The first chapter of Ephesians is wonderfully Trinitarian – plenty about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who makes an appearance towards the end of our passage. The Holy Spirit is both God's guarantee of his future and a foretaste as well. We may think of it this way – we all see on televisions trailers of this or that film or series to come to try and persuade us to watch. Can I say this reverently - the Holy Spirit is God's trailer – the main feature is still to come, but we can know in part what we will know more fully. We are still on the way.

He is Lord of the past, of the present and of the future – how can we hold on to that? There's one clue in the way our passage begins and ends with praise – *blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ through to the praise of his glory*. I think Paul is encouraging the Ephesian Christians – and us – to lift up our hearts and praise the Lord. It puts everything into perspective. Just put down on the seat next to you everything that troubles you and deliberately and consciously praise the Lord of our past, present and future. That's a word for each of us personally.

There is also a word for us as a church community as we start our vacancy. Lord of the past. Looking back we may be grateful – praise God; we may be a little more nuanced, because church is about relationships, and relationships are always tricky. We are forgiven and by God's grace we can let go. Let's not carry issues from the past into the vacancy. He is Lord of the present. David and Kathy, Roseanna and Leo have moved on from our church here, but the Holy Spirit hasn't. Jesus is still Lord.

He is Lord of the future. None of us knows what lies ahead for us personally. We make plans, and I ought to say here that I will need to dash after our worship this morning – there's a lunch I need to go to as part of my civic duties over the river. We all make plans and sometimes they work out. As a parish we make plans, put rotas together and our heads together to prepare for the appointment of a new vicar. So much unknown, but so great a Lord who holds the future and who holds us into the future. Praise him and trust him. He is Lord – of all that's gone, of all that is, and of all that will be. Praise him and trust him.

Prayer