

Year C, All Saints Day
November 6, 2016
By Thomas L. Truby
Ephesians 1:11-23

All God's people, Every Human on the Face of This Earth!

Our inheritance as Jesus-followers is a hope that is bigger than we are. God knows our weakness and that we need someone bigger or we will puff ourselves up and destroy ourselves in our desire to be king of the mountain. So God made a plan, and it was a plan that will work, no matter how long it takes. It's a plan that brings honor to God's glory, not our own, and it centers on hope in Christ.

This plan delivers us from ourselves and our worst failings. The plan is contained in the word of truth in Christ, which is the good news of your salvation.

When we believe in Jesus Christ—that is, that he shows us an all-loving, non-retaliatory and totally peaceful God; something changes inside us. We feel safe and protected because retribution, punishment, the accusing finger of “you are bad, deeply bad, for all time,” is sealed out. It can't get to us. Badness is excluded by the caulking compound of forgiveness. We are shrunk-wrapped in the Holy Spirit—that spirit of the way God is. “God is love and in him there is no darkness at all.”

This sense that all is well at the most profound level is God's down payment to us on our inheritance—we know now and feel in advance what we will one day know in full. We get to be in the process of being redeemed by this hope in advance. We are the exemplars of what God is doing for the whole human race. We are here to bring honor to God so that other people will see God's glory, God's wonderfully beneficent reputation. We aren't the glorious ones; in fact we are the ones most aware of not being glorious. We Jesus-followers, of all people, know where glory comes from and it's not from us. It is from our Lord Jesus Christ.

The writer of Ephesians, who was not Paul, but wrote in Paul's name, writes, “Since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, this is the reason that I don't stop giving thanks to God for you when I remember you in my prayers.” Now I must make a confession to you. I have always thought that this meant that when the Jesus-followers in the city of Ephesus love all God's people, the writer was talking about all the other Jesus-followers; all the people who were part of their tribe, their group, their fellowship, their church. I thought the writer was praising them for getting along well with each other. And I think that's part of it, but I think there is more. I think Ephesians should be taken literally here. Word had gotten back

about how these Jesus-followers loved all God's people and he meant all God's people on the earth. Not their particular tribe but the entire human species.

My hunch is that this is an expanding awareness, a positive virus that keeps spreading, that constantly includes new categories of people, people we hadn't thought of before or noticed in their particularity. It may even expand beyond our own species and include other creatures and creation itself.

For example, my new awareness includes a deepened understanding of institutional racism as I read, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander and Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption, by Bryan Stevenson. These books opened "the eyes of my heart" and I shed many tears as my soul painfully stretched. This year my awareness of the plight of our Native American brothers and sisters has been deepened by the book, Massacre at Sand Creek: How Methodists Were Involved in an American Tragedy by Gary Roberts. Our adult Sunday School class is studying On this Spirit Walk: The Voices of Native American and Indigenous Peoples by Henrietta Mann and Anita Phillips. This emerging awareness for Native Americans has been enhanced by meeting Sam Robertson, a Native American who is currently at Standing Rock in North Dakota and sending back reports. My world is expanding, my humanity deepening and I find it exhilarating.

Now I understand more deeply the problem of addiction and our cultures addiction to it as revealed in Johann Hari's, Chasing the Scream; The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs. Each of these books significantly expanded my love of all God's people.

This was what the writer to the Ephesians was seeing in the followers of Jesus in Ephesus and he wanted this habit of openness and inquiry to deepen. He writes, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that makes God known to you." The writer doesn't want us to open our minds to all God's people because he thinks we should. He wants us to do it out of a sense of calling from God.

On Thursday night Laura and I went to see a play at the Armory in downtown Portland entitled Hold These Truths. The one-man play gave us eyes to see how our Japanese-American fellow citizens experienced their incarceration during World War Two. Our eyes filled with tears as we felt with them. After it was over we all stood in confession, honor and recognition. We needed to express our appreciation for what our Japanese-American brother had caused us to see.

The writer to the Ephesians goes on, "I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God's call." "The eyes of your heart," what a beautiful image! This is the only place in the Bible where it is used. With the writer of Ephesians I pray that God will open the eyes of our heart to see how alike we are as humans and how we all want peace. He wants us to see that we need each other and no one should be left below the radar.

How do we open the eyes of our heart? How do we let more light into our inner world? We allow ourselves to get to know all God's people. If we want to follow Jesus, this is what we must do.

This vision for all God's people is the hope of God's call, it is the richness of God's glorious inheritance. We who have begun to experience this are just beginning to realize the overwhelming greatness of God's power that is working among us believers. This is what animates us and gives us hope. This is why we can wake up on Wednesday morning and arise with hope no matter who is elected. We have tied ourselves to a power deeper than politics, deeper than the cycles of history and deeper than religion. "This power is conferred by the energy of God's powerful strength." We are not siphoning energy from a human and limited source; we have tapped into the power of our creator God who loves all God's people.

How do we know that God's power is at work in our world, particularly when things look so dark? Here is the writer of the Epistle to the Ephesians answer. "God's power was at work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and sat him at God's right side in the heavens, far above every ruler and authority and power and angelic power, any power that might be named not only now but in the future." We Jesus-followers do not say either the Democrats or the Republicans are Lord. We do not say our two-party system, a single party system nor any possible multiple-party system is Lord. We do not say capitalism is Lord, nor the United States is Lord. Always we say "Jesus is Lord" and this Jesus is bigger than us all and bigger than our religion. Jesus is Lord because Jesus shows us God, who loves all God's people, every human on the face of this earth. Amen.