

Better Than Walmart (Jesus Empowers the Staff)
 3rd in a series of 5 “The Jesus Enterprise” -- Ephesians 1:3-14
 Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 7th Sunday after Pentecost (July 15) 2012

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory..

In the first week of this sermon series we were introduced to the nature of the Jesus Enterprise – known as “**JESUS INCORPORATED**” (or “the Body of Christ.”)

Last week, we heard how Jesus commissions the staff to do the work of the Enterprise. But, when things don’t go quite the way we expect, Jesus tells the staff (us) to shake it off.

The “**testimony**” of the “**dirt on the ground**” is

- a. **your opinion of me does not determine my worth, because I am a “beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.”**,
- b. **Just because you don’t like how the Gospel of Jesus Christ sounds does NOT mean that I ought to change the message**,
- c. **Jesus, Inc. does not require instant gratification. Be faithful. Wait for the Lord**,

In the following weeks we will explore:

1. How Jesus Shows the Staff the **Need for Balance**
2. How We Must Remember **That It IS Jesus’ Enterprise – not ours**

In today's Epistle Lesson, Paul reminds us how Jesus empowers the Staff (them, then and us, now) for the work of the Enterprise.

Actually, in today's text **the POWER is not so much GIVEN as it is REVEALED.**

It's similar to where our membership vows remind us of the power that God instills in us:

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

Whenever we hear that question and answer "I do," we are reminded that the power does not begin with us; it only goes through us. Like good preachers are spark plugs – knowing that the power does not come from them, but only through them, and hence their job is to keep themselves as free from grit and gunk as possible – so, too it is for ALL OF JESUS' STAFF.

Paul instructs the Staff in Ephesus in this letter that this good stuff comes from **WHO WE ARE** – *destined for adoption as God's children*. It's in our DNA. Like our brother, Jesus – the pioneer and perfecter of our faith – we've got the power.

Now, I know that some people have a problem with this language: *destined for adoption as God's children* because they think it means predestination, or double predestination, the way some other branches on the Christian tree believe.

Let me see if I can help put this into a more acceptable light:

The writer of the 4th Gospel called himself "**the disciple whom Jesus loved.**" That does **NOT** mean Jesus loved him more than others, or to the exclusion of others

Rather it means that for “John,” it was his identity. That description **“the disciple whom Jesus loved”** was what he used instead of his name.

What do you suppose it would mean for people if they really believed that this was THEIR identity – a beloved one.

In the same manner, accepting our predestination as adopted children of God, siblings of Jesus, does **NOT** mean that **others are not also destined for adoption as God’s children**

It raises the same question involved in the sermon preached here a few weeks back: **“Why do some Christians seem to insist that somebody has got to go to hell?”**

As I briefly reviewed last week’s sermon highlights at the beginning of today’s sermon: one of the “testimonies” of the dust shaken from the feet, is that **your opinion of me does not determine my worth, because I am a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold**,

After worship, on Sunday afternoon, the mother of five year old Tabitha sent me a text message of what Tabitha said. (I quote it only with her permission, and I’m sorry that an out of town holiday prevented Tabitha from being here today.) She said to her momma: ***When Monty talked about “beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold” he was talking about me, wasn’t he?***

And then -- after a brief pause – ***he’s talking about other people, too, isn’t he?***

For Tabitha’s entire life, she has been regularly brought to a church where not just the pastor, but everybody knows that the name given them in Baptism is **“beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.”**

When Tabitha’s mother heard the news report on the multiple felony child molestation convictions of Jerry Sandusky, she texted me, ***“This is***

such a sad, sad thing. But the strange thing is that I can't shut off this voice in my head that says, 'He, too, is "beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.".'"

Tabitha just doesn't have much of a chance in that **sort of church environment** and **home environment** **BUT TO BELIEVE** that her identity, her destiny, is as a **"beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold."**— not to the exclusion of others, or even as competitively better than others.

Can you just imagine how different the world might be if all the children could grow up learning what Tabitha is learning. And if Tabitha were to have that belief reinforced by the adults in her life, so she does not lose that belief.

Let me suggest to you, as I did a few weeks ago: Christianity might be divided into two groups: (a) those for whom sinfulness is at the center; and (b) those for whom Blessedness is at the center.

Certainly the issues of blessing and sinfulness have a very serious role to play in any discussion of theology. But it makes such a difference if the center of your faith is

"I am a broken human from the beginning, in need of being fixed"
or

"I am a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold, made in the very image of God – a sibling of Jesus."

Matthew Fox's book, *Original Blessing*, is a good read for folks who'd like to explore this distinction, for folks who'd like confirmation that they are not heretics for believing that little babies are born innocent and blessed --

and not stained by the sin of First Man & First Woman in the garden - the sin of others for which they must somehow be fixed.

It's the difference between believing that you **begin broken** versus **begin blessed and with a great potential, that you need not earn, but only accept.**

Today's sermon sub-title is "Jesus EMPOWERS the staff. **Hospitality** is one of the most empowering tools of Jesus, Inc.

It is in HOSPITALITY that we help others to see their identity, to see their predetermined destination, to help them see just what is their potential.

Jesus was all the time doing that, walking up to someone, reaching into his robe and pulling out that remarkable mirror for them to look into – to see their potential, and feeling His love, and knowing that they could indeed become just that.

I have noticed over the past few months, although I confess that it wasn't until a couple of weeks ago that I connected the dots to realize, that I have not been encountered by a greeter at Walmart.

They used to always have a greeter at the entrance. They also used to never have a clerk tell you where something is, but would always personally take you to the item's location.

That hospitality has drifted away. They would rather you walk around aimlessly looking for your product and hope that you pick up a few other things along the way that you had not intended to pick up. (That's why they keep changing the location of things.

For you see, although hospitality used to be an important feature of Walmart, they've changed their strategy, because for Walmart, hospitality is only important to the extent that it affects their bottom line.

Walmart is most concerned about a numerical bottom line.

On the other hand, the Jesus Enterprise is different. NUMBERS are not what we are about. People in the Kingdom, recognizing their potential – people discovering their citizenship: this is what the Jesus Enterprise is all about. Jesus Inc. is most concerned about people accepting their blessedness.

Our Father in Christ, the Rev'd Mr. John Wesley said: ***“I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.”***

If we ever get to the point where we are more concerned about NUMBERS then about people seeing what they are destined to be – then we might as well admit that Wesley's fears are confirmed, for we will have lost our soul and become like Walmart.

But, Jesus, Incorporated – the Body of Christ -- is better than that. Hospitality for us is about WHO WE ARE, not HOW MANY WE ARE.

We are destined to be children of God, siblings of Jesus, living specimens made in the very image of God – ***beloved children of God, precious and beautiful to behold***. I pray that there will always be plenty of Tabitha's who will get that right, and plenty of churches where they can learn that Truth..

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.