

## God's Lavish Grace

By Linda Rex

**July 14, 2024, Proper 10 / After Pentecost**—In my view, one very inspiring passage with regards to God's grace is the New Testament passage for this Sunday, Ephesians 1:3-14. In this opening eulogy (which in Greek is one very long sentence), the lavish grace of God is celebrated and extolled by the apostle Paul.

As Paul blesses the God who has blessed all of us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,” we are swept up into adoration and worship of the Triune God who has brought us into relationship with himself through Jesus in the Spirit. You might wish to stop and take a moment to underline or mark each time Paul uses the expression “in Christ” or “in him” or something similar in this pericope. In this short passage, which celebrates the passionate and lavish love of our heavenly Father, we find that his beloved Son, Jesus, is central to our redemption, salvation, and glorification. It is in Jesus Christ that we find ourselves lavishly gifted and included in his own relationship with his Father in the Spirit. All human effort drops off into the pool of participation in Christ, and we find ourselves swept up into and included in Jesus' own life with his Abba in the Spirit.

Here, in the midst of this blessing, we discover the magnitude and depths of God's love for us. God's passionate affection for us, his creatures, is expressed by his choice that we be holy and blameless before him—in Christ, before the foundation of the world. We discover that God always meant for us to be his adopted children. God always meant for us to live in union and communion with himself in the Spirit. So, in Christ, he did all that was necessary for this to occur, enabling us to be who he created us to be, inheritors of salvation, participants in God's life and love by the heavenly Spirit.

The concept of adoption in this passage points to a couple of things. First, in the Mirror Bible, the translator says that the word for sonship or adoption, *huiothesia*, refers more to a coming of age rather than the idea of Roman adoption. According to this metaphor, in Christ, our humanity comes to its fullest and most profound expression. The fulfillment of all God meant for us as human beings is found in Jesus Christ, the one who is fully God and fully man, who has lived our life, died our death, and risen again, sending us the Spirit so we may share in his divine perfections and in his own face-to-face communion with his Father in the Spirit.

Secondly, as other commentators point out, in the Roman culture of that day a newborn child was often placed at the father's feet. The father then chose whether to keep or discard the child. Such a child could be rejected or disinherited at any point in his or her life, depending upon the father's choice. In contrast, in the Roman culture of that day, an adoption was a difficult and expensive process, and once done, could not be undone. Therefore, an adopted child was always included in the family and could never be disinherited. In this metaphor, God's passionate love for us as his children is expressed in his selection of us, but going even beyond that, in his adoption of us as his very own. In this way, adoption, and even sonship, become powerful metaphors for the lavish love and grace of our heavenly Father, when it comes to our inclusion in God's life and love.

When we take the time to meditate on this passage, it is inspiring to consider how much God, from before time began, considered us. When we believe that God doesn't even realize we exist or that he doesn't really care, we should look at the broad horizon of our human existence, however long it may be. And as we do this, we want to go even farther back, before all that. Before time began, we were on God's mind and heart, and he was planning for us. Like parents planning for the coming of a newborn child, our heavenly Father excitedly planned for our existence, creating through his Son by the Spirit a world in which we could live, explore, and

grow into maturity. And our Triune God planned for our turning away into sin and death, knowing that he, in Christ, held the key for our ultimate redemption, salvation, and glorification. Our Father's purposes and plans will be realized in spite of our failures and shortcomings, because we are in Christ and have been given, and in him have received, the Holy Spirit. And this is why, even when life looks dark, we have hope.

*Dear Trinity, thank you for including us in your life and love. Thank you for lavishing your grace upon us, through all you have done from before time, are doing even now, and will do in the world to come. Awaken us to the abundance of all the spiritual blessings which are ours in you, our blessed Father, Jesus, and Spirit. Amen.*

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.”* Ephesians 1:3–14 NASB