

July 14, 2024

Ephesians 1:3-14

“The Mystery Revealed!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We desire to know. And so we work hard to figure things out. In our age, we have come to know a lot of things. The trouble is that we have acquired a knowledge about what things are and how to use them, but we have little or no concern about why it is or where it came from and how it's related to why we are here and where we are going. We are inclined to exploit what we know out of self-serving ambition.

There is dangerous knowledge. This is what Mary Shelly wrote about in her well-known 1818 novel titled *Frankenstein*. Victor's monstrous creation of unnatural life, and his reckless pursuit of knowledge, eventually resulted in the loss of what was most important to him. His great knowledge was without any consideration of the author of life and the rules that go with what life is and isn't. We are doing this a lot in our day with things like gene editing, AI, climate control, new discoveries, and on and on it goes.

In the novel, the creation of Frankenstein is compared to the first man Adam. The monster says: "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel." In the epigraph of the 1818 edition it says: "Did I request Thee, Maker, from my clay? To mould me man? To solicit thee From darkness to promote me?" Deep thoughts that lead to other thoughts that we hardly consider when we make our monsters.

This brings us to the human pursuit of religion without revealed truth. It always ends up in the elevation of humanity and what we are going to do to save ourselves. When we pursue mysteries of the divine, without the unaltered truth of God's revelation, we only end up with a worship that is in the image of ourselves and what we want. And there is no salvation found in us. What we bring to the table are failures and curses. We bring our evil self-love and destruction.

Our lives are a mess. Because of us this creation is a mess. We spend our whole lives trying to clean up the mess and end up making more mess. And then we die and return to dust which is a horrible first step into the great beyond. Losing our physicality, which we are so desperate to keep forever young, reveals within us a gnawing uncertainty that death is not good (unless we have Jesus). This morning we bring to church failures and curses that we feel deeply about. We bring with us the wreck of life in so many manifestations that we can hardly count. So, what is it that you bring with you this morning? Well, whatever it is you bring, our epistle lesson addresses with **The Mystery Revealed!**

It isn't the type of revealed mystery that the hardened, unbelieving world is going to want to hear because it does not involve a heaven on this earth. It does not involve the exaltation of humanity and a permission to do evil. In fact, the mystery makes it clear that the solution is entirely outside of ourselves when Paul writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." This is the language of praise. The apostle is speaking of who God is and all that he has done. Only he is praised. And then Paul adds: "... who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

Imagine that! The Father chose us in Christ before we were even born! All things have been considered, including our failures and curses. Regardless of what we really deserve for loving darkness

rather than the light because our works were evil, we have been chosen to be holy and blameless before God. Right from the start we are brought to the realization that every failure and curse has been removed from us by an undeserved kindness that is inexpressible. You name the failures and the curses on your mind today. God has replaced them with everything that belongs to him in Christ - every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places - those places where God is - where his goodness and gifts are found and are truly ours in his one and only Son! Amazing! We were elected to participate in his gifts of life and salvation.

Paul writes: “in love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” In love he chose you and me to be adopted children. God loves you and me! And to be adopted children means that he wishes to give us himself and everything that is. This is according to the purpose of his will. So here we meet the answer to the question that plagues humanity to its very core. What is the purpose of it all? The purpose of you and me is everything that God has planned for us in his desire to give us his everlasting love. The purpose of you and me is that we may have forever joy in all that is or ever will be. All this in the “Beloved” - who is Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on to say: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” Having now understood the purpose of his will, we are brought to the mystery of his will. In other words, we are brought to the Beloved who will fulfill God’s purpose for us because we can’t do it ourselves. How did he do it? The Son of God gave himself. He became one of us. He redeemed us by his blood, and thereby pays the price for our failures and curses. He takes the blame and he endures all the consequences.

The shedding of the blood takes us to the physical giving of himself and his life. The fact that it is the person of the Son who does this for us on the cross brings the forgiveness of sins and the removal of all that sin brings. This is the wealth of his undeserved kindness. He gives the only thing that can be given so that we may receive love. He gives himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Indeed, the riches of his grace have been lavished upon us, that is, given in such a way that we lack nothing. This we have in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose. And what’s the end? Our destination is to be united with God in a union that we cannot fully understand or explain.

We could not know these mysteries if they had not been revealed to us through the coming of Christ, and the record of him and all he has done. Like I said a moment ago, our destination is to be united with God in a union that we cannot fully understand or explain. However, we can say that it is a participation. In other words, we will be so connected to him that we ourselves will be changed by who he is. Even now, by faith, this is happening. But we wait for the consummation. In that day we will see Jesus as he is, while fully embracing him as groom and we as bride. And it will be wonderful!

Paul goes on to connect the mystery of his will to the counsel of his will. Here all things happen according to the plan of his will. These things are at work now. The counsel of his will is when we heard

the gospel of our salvation, believing in him and “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” Thus, the purpose of the will of the Father is in the mystery of his will as revealed in Jesus, and is ours in the counsel of his will, which is found in the written gospel and Baptism. Indeed! The Holy Spirit is ours who points us to the mystery and the purpose of everything - the beginning and the end!

In Baptism the Holy Spirit makes it plain that we are owned by him and the Son and the Father. In faith we are invited to rest in the cleansing waters of Baptism. In other words, everything that Paul is saying is true because it has been already given in the water and Spirit. This is our guarantee of our inheritance until faith and hope disappear in the day of Christ. What we have now by faith will one day be seen with resurrected eyes. While it is finished it is yet to be manifestly finished. We look forward to the day when Jesus raises us up from the dead with a spiritual body and takes us to be with him in a new creation.

Thus, for the Christian there are no thoughts of cryogenic freezing to bring us back to life. In Christ, there is no uploading our memories to a file to be uploaded into a new body for the future. Here there is no heaven on earth or the impossible task of saving the world or finding a new and perfect world somewhere else in the universe. Here there is no AI Jesus to speak to us. In Christ there is no salvation by our own power or strength or in political figures.

The Mystery Revealed is that we were placed here for only a time that we may know the full extent of the love of God in Christ. In this creation we have received a necessary education to become eternal companions of the one who made us. Soon **The Mystery Revealed** will give way to a glory that currently defies a full definition. In the meantime, let us take to heart the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott