

## **Gathering Up All Things**

Ephesians 1:3-14

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Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us in Christ  
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,  
just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world  
to be holy and blameless before him in love.

He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ,  
according to the good pleasure of his will,  
to the praise of his glorious grace  
that 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 that he lavished on us.

With all wisdom and insight  
he has made known to us the mystery of his will,  
according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,  
as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him,  
things in heaven and things on earth.

In 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,  
so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ,  
might live for the praise of his glory.

In 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;  
this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption  
as God's own people, to the praise of God's glory.

# **Gathering Up All Things**

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July 11, 2021

Rev. Michael Catanzaro

## **I.**

If there was ever a week for a pastor to throw in the towel on a sermon and opt, instead, for a “hymn sing” this was certainly it. I was flat out all last week with the First Responder Meet & Greet on Thursday and the reopening of the fountain on Friday, and there isn’t much gas left in this old tank of mine, nor enough time in the week. Unfortunately, though, we’re not singing hymns until August 15th, so we’re going to take it easy on the accelerator and coast down the hills whenever we can. I started writing this sermon Thursday afternoon while sitting on my porch; in the calm before the unfortunate storm. And, holy cow, did it storm. The rain came down in buckets, the proverbial cats and dogs, time to build the Ark kind of stuff; 3.13 inches of it to be precise.

## **II.**

I know this because Mary Kelly, our congregation’s resident Dairy Farmer, told me so. For Mary and her husband, Allen, the rain on the plains of their hay fields matters very much to them and their herd so they keep a rain gauge as a measure. Mary informed me all of this while we were standing out under a tent in the front lawn of the church as she was cooking what turned out to be 100 hotdogs for the First Responders Meet and Greet our church sponsored on Thursday night. My vision for the evening was to have all of us in the park, band playing, folks dancing, kids climbing on fire trucks, with crowds of people roaming the park and getting a sneak peak at the fountain ahead of the reopening the following day and all of us, together, enjoying a beautiful summer’s evening in Canton. It was, I readily admit, a beautiful vision. Alas, though, it did not turn out as I had imagined.

### III.

Instead we gathered up all things and moved the party indoors to Fellowship Hall. It was quite a crew we had on hand: Rich and Ellen Grayson, Barb Brown, Pat Mace, Linda Potter, Marcy Bennett, Jorge Nsundidi along with Mary Kelly and her friend, David Robertson (dog Orie) visiting all the way from Arkansas; not to mention all the folks who baked cookies and donated to the cause: Mary Kelly, Sarah Melville, Linda Potter, Marcy Bennett, Barb Brown, Susan Akins, Bill & Karen Parker, Ellen Grayson, Karen Bailey, Rita Ostrander, Lynne Pickens, Pat Mace, Jim and Maria Franklin, Jean McGuire and Vicki McLean. Though it didn't *quite* turn out the way I had imagined, it was a wonderful evening in its own way.

### IV.

Carter Houk, Donnie Woodcock and the band were spot on, as always. We had more food than you can shake a stick at (we'll be eating hot-dogs at coffee hour for the rest of the summer) the fire department showed up in mass, and we had half the police force dressed in their recently bequeathed tie-dye t-shirts. It was a great night for our church and for our community; all made possible by this congregation.





## V.

The following day, on Friday, the long awaited moment had arrived to reopen the fountain. The VFW Color Guard was there, along with the Goldenaires Barber-shoppers, and a nice crowd of folks all gathered to commemorate and celebrate this very hopeful event in the life of our community. And, our church doled out 100 certificates for a free ice-cream cone to all the kids in attendance; a big hit, to be sure. On top of it all, the fountain flowed and held water. Which, as you might imagine, was a huge relief; especially considering we hadn't tried it until that very morning. Whew!

As it said in the donor sheet we distributed: *The congregation of the First Presbyterian Church is humbled by the confidence and trust the community places in us for stewardship of the Park. Thank you.* It certainly was a great day for the community, but it was an even *greater* day for our church.



## VI.

In today's scripture reading from the first chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul make a rather bold and somewhat abtrusive claim: that God has a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in God. As is often the case with Paul, this passage also offers the reader an overabundance of riches: that Christ has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing, that God chose us in Christ *before* the foundation of the world and in him *we* have been made to be holy and blameless in love, that we have been destined for adoption as God's children, that the riches of God's grace have been *lavished* on us, that the mystery of God's will has been made known to us so we might live for the praise of God's glory, and that we have been marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. Whew, again! That certainly is a great deal to chew on, and to preach on.

## VII.

What captured my attention most from the passage, however, is this notion that all things will be gathered up in God as part of God's plan for the fullness of time. Certainly, we all want and need a belief that God has a plan not only for our lives, but for the entire creation. Rather than a dog-eat-dog, every person for themself chaotic mess that sees all of us racing to a finish line that doesn't exist, we, instead, understand our lives to have purpose, direction and meaning.

As people of faith, we often forget that too many people in this world go about their days without a rain gauge; without some ultimate means to measure themselves and their lives. Which helps to explain why so many adopt the lesser yardsticks of wealth, possessions, power and notoriety. These, though, are fool's errands, and have very little to do with any kind of real meaning or purpose, and serve only to set us apart rather than bind us together. In contrast, Paul asserts that in the fullness of time *God* will gather up all things, and that all things will be gathered up *in* God.

## VIII.

It is now early Saturday morning as I write these words, and the dust has finally begun to settle not just on the events of this past week with the First Responder Meet & Greet and the reopening of the Fountain, but from the almost five years of planning, fund-raising, organizing, scheduling and

implementation that led up to the fountain being rebuilt and the water finally being turned back on at long last. Though I certainly will be reflecting for quite awhile on this journey which has been taken place, I can tell one thing right now for sure: the fruit of such a labor isn't about the stone and metal of a fountain, it isn't about what the endeavor means for Canton or, even, for our church, and it isn't about any kind of satisfaction found or thanks received.

## **IX.**

Instead, it has been about the *joy*. The joy of coming together with people, the joy of working toward a common goal, and the joy of celebrating our labor even regardless of what that labor achieves. We hear the Apostle Paul speak about some future moment, however near or far off, when God will gather up all things and all of us will be gathered together in God; which is great. However, what I want to know is what we're going to do once we get there, all gathered together in God? If my experience with the fountain over the past few years is any indication, the answer I'd suggest to you this morning, is the same as what can be found in our denomination's Book of Confessions from question 1 of the Westminster Short Catechism:

*Q: What is the chief end of humanity?*

*A: Humanity's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy God forever.*

## **X.**

Not only is glorifying God and enjoying God forever our destination and what do once we arrive there, it is the process by which we *make* the journey. That is, if we are being smart about it; and very often we aren't. I know that in the church we talk a lot about glorifying God. We do so with respect to worship, with our songs, prayers and gifts. However, the truth is the best means we have of glorifying God is what we chose to *do* with our lives on a day to day basis, and the way in which we go about *leading* this life of ours. Do we go have the awareness and discipline to easy on the accelerator even though we are constantly being pushed by the speed of traffic? Do we coast down the hills whenever we can to sincerely and truly enjoy the ride? Because for you and for me, the fullness of time really isn't that long at all; this is the only ride we get and it doesn't go on forever.

## **XI.**

While it is certainly true I'm greatly relieved that water is flowing in the fountain once more, what I'm most pleased about is the joy that was found along the way, in working with Dave Ragan from the DPW; with the Mayor, Mike Dalton; with Tyler Locke, the contractor and a child of this church, and his crew; with Paul Mitchell, my co-chair in the endeavor; and the joy we found as a church in taking on this project and making real our ownership of the park. The job needed to get done, and we did it. More importantly, though, we had fun all along the way; we had joy.

## **XII.**

However, with all this going on, you might be surprised to discover my greatest joy this week, these past four years, and for the past 23 years, has been the joy I have found in all of you. The joyous way we, as a congregation and as a church, have decided to take this ride through life together. Sometimes the storms have been unexpected and severe, and we could have easily thrown in the towel. Often times the beautiful visions we have had turned out to be different than we imagined. Almost always, though, they have turned out to be oh so wonderful nonetheless. True, we don't have a one-horse open sleigh, but all the while and for all these years we sure have been laughing all the way. And, in so doing, we are living to the praise of God's glory who has gathered up all of us here on the Park. Amen.