Maplewood Presbyterian Church 07.07.2019 Kosta Theofanos, Lay Missionary/Chaplain

OT Isaiah 63:7-14 NT Ephesians 1:1-14 FR Éphésiens 1:1-14 Responsive Reading: Psalm 126

 *“The pledge of our inheritance”*

Isaiah 63:7-14 (NRSV)

God’s Mercy Remembered

**7**I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord,
    the praiseworthy acts of the Lord,
because of all that the Lord has done for us,
    and the great favor to the house of Israel
that he has shown them according to his mercy,
    according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
**8**For he said, “Surely they are my people,
    children who will not deal falsely”;
and he became their savior
**9**    in all their distress.
It was no messenger[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+63%3A7-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18876a)] or angel
    but his presence that saved them;[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+63%3A7-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18876b)]
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
    he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

**10**But they rebelled
    and grieved his holy spirit;
therefore he became their enemy;
    he himself fought against them.
**11**Then they[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+63%3A7-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18878c)] remembered the days of old,
    of Moses his servant.[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+63%3A7-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18878d)]
Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea
    with the shepherds of his flock?
Where is the one who put within them
    his holy spirit,
**12**who caused his glorious arm
    to march at the right hand of Moses,
who divided the waters before them
    to make for himself an everlasting name,
**13**    who led them through the depths?

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Like a horse in the desert,
    they did not stumble.
**14**Like cattle that go down into the valley,
    the spirit of the Lord gave them rest.
Thus you led your people,
    to make for yourself a glorious name.

1. [Isaiah 63:9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+63%3A7-14+&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-18876) Gk: Heb *anguish*
2. [Isaiah 63:9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+63%3A7-14+&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-18876) Or *savior.****9****In all their distress he was distressed; the angel of his presence saved them;*
3. [Isaiah 63:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+63%3A7-14+&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-18878) Heb *he*
4. [Isaiah 63:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+63%3A7-14+&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-18878) Cn: Heb *his people*

Ephesians 1:1-14 (NRSV)

*Salutation*

**1**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29191a)] in Christ Jesus:

**2**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Spiritual Blessings in Christ*

**3**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, **4**just as he chose us in Christ[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29194b)] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. **5**He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, **6**to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. **7**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace **8**that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight **9**he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, **10**as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. **11**In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29201c)] having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, **12**so that we, who were the first to set our

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hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. **13**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; **14**this[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29204d)] is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

1. [Ephesians 1:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-29191) Other ancient authorities lack *in Ephesus*, reading *saints who are also faithful*
2. [Ephesians 1:4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-29194) Gk *in him*
3. [Ephesians 1:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-29201) Or *been made a heritage*
4. [Ephesians 1:14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#en-NRSV-29204) Other ancient authorities read *who*

ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ 1:1-14 SBL Greek New Testament (SBLGNT)

**1**Παῦλος ἀπόστολος [[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#fgrc-SBLGNT-6031a)]Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν [[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#fgrc-SBLGNT-6031b)][ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ· **2**χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

**3**Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ, **4**καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, **5**προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἱοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, **6**εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ [[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#fgrc-SBLGNT-6036c)]ἧς ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ, **7**ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν παραπτωμάτων, κατὰ [[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#fgrc-SBLGNT-6037d)]τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ **8**ἧς ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει **9**γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ **10**εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· ἐν αὐτῷ, **11**ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, **12**εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ· **13**ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ, **14**[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#fgrc-SBLGNT-6044e)]ὅ ἐστιν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως, εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.

1. [ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ 1:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#grc-SBLGNT-6031) **Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ** WH Treg NIV ] Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ RP
2. [ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ 1:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#grc-SBLGNT-6031) **ἐν Ἐφέσῳ** WH Treg NIV RP ] – WHapp
3. [ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ 1:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#grc-SBLGNT-6036) **ἧς** WH Treg NIV ] ἐν ᾗ RP

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1. [ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ 1:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#grc-SBLGNT-6037) **τὸ πλοῦτος** WH Treg NIV ] τὸν πλοῦτον RP
2. [ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ 1:14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=SBLGNT#grc-SBLGNT-6044) **ὅ** WH NIV ] ὅς Treg RP\

“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; **14**this[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1%3A1-14+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29204d)] is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.”

The Letter to the Ephesians was set in today’s Asia Minor and follows Paul’s familiar address to his hearers: there’s a greeting or salutation, an exhortation, a pressing spiritual or churchly matter, encouragement, and a blessing or doxology. Yet we can also hear an echo in the letter telling us Paul is not his usual self; he sounds tired and worried from being imprisoned in Rome and his future seems bleak. Word has come down the v*ia ignatia* that he was arrested for preaching the Gospel. The powers that be do not tolerate challenges to their authority, especially not a confession of faith in a crucified messiah who is reported to have come back from the dead. The powers that be worry about resistance to the *Pax Romana* or “peace through power”. In the larger sense, we too live under a modern-day Pax Romana. Only it comes in the form of spiritual malaise in a culture where our needs are created for us by free-market forces. This consumer demand comes at a terrible cost of inexpressible stress and neurosis – *affliction* - to us and to our senior population. It is striking that Paul knows he cannot resist this “peace through force” - no peace at all – by holding firm to his conviction believers are promised a true peace in Jesus Christ that surpasses understanding. Paul knows this is better than imprisonment

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and even his life.

Any of us in this sanctuary today moved by a deep desire to understand the Christian faith, may come to appreciate it is through personal testing of faith that our desire for peace is discerned. For we know the foremost symbol of our faith is the cross. This is what the early Christian believers concerned themselves with. It is the mark of our faith in Christ’s lordship because we must contend with life-negating forces and discipleship involves personal cost. Otherwise, it is not truly a gospel of grace we seek. Reformed or Presbyterian spirituality, according to John Calvin, believes the benefits of Christ are ours as result of a secret communion we have with Christ himself.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the *Institutes,* he distinguishes two graces we receive from Christ; reconciliation and sanctification. Neither of these is possible unless we, all of us - you and I right here and now - know our lives to be sustained by the grace of Jesus Christ where the center of our faith is the real presence of his Spirit as head of the church. This is the heart of *Tea & Talk*.

In our *Tea & Talk* outreach, the seniors really inspire me. Last Friday with our Greek community partner, we watched as the elections unfolded and we read Dionysios Solomos’ poem that became the national anthem. We know the results could have serious consequences for the nation and for Europe by moving it from the democratic left and moderate position to a fearful direction feeding even far-right nationalism. Everyone is on edge.

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The seniors feel powerless and like many here in Canada feel their vote will not change anything. Pessimism has collapsed into despair. And what would such a failure of democracy mean for world-consciousness of the Gospel that began in Jerusalem and went out to all the Greek-speaking world? It flourished in Greece under the leadership of a senior named Paul of Tarsus who for the last two millennia has had a special significance for God’s mission to the world. What would Paul say about the future of the Gospel if he were among us today? What would he counsel as “the pledge of our inheritance”? He meant our share in the spiritual blessing of the Gospel comes when faith is under fire. He envisioned God’s Mission as giving preference to the most vulnerable among us – orphans, widows and widowers, the imprisoned, the poor and sick. He gathered benevolence funds to alleviate their burden. He writes with pastoral heart to friends, brothers and sisters in the Lord in an appeal for solidarity and help.

Paul’s appeal is important for our seniors’ respite care outreach so let us this morning tease out what he means in attempting two things: Let us explore an echo in Paul’s letter – his oft-repeated saying “the pledge of our inheritance”. Then, let Paul speak to our hope the *Tea and Talk* mayflourish into a respite care center for seniors, their families, and care-givers because we want to see our preaching – and so the vision we are gifted – become practice.

 A pastoral care ministry that offers respite, you say? Yes. Consider friends, how Paul envisions our share in Christ’s glory brings spiritual

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blessing because of people’s need for “rest” from world-weariness. It is a malaise we experience in laboring under principalities and powers that show little compassion for the Everyman. How does the saying go? Oh, yes. Governments in cahoots with powerful corporations employ tons of smart money managers who ‘*cut, cut, cut’* ever-more social and health benefits abandoning people who cannot afford it. The World Bank catch-word is “structural adjustment program”. They seem to know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. I often repeat in our doxology we offer our donations to God in gratitude for all that we are and all we receive because these come from God and by His Spirit the gifts of the people are blessed for the ministry of reconciliation. And you know what? “*rest”* - that deeply spiritual expression for the people of the first covenant and for people of the second covenant in Jesus Christ – is God’s promise as “the pledge of our inheritance”. But don’t take my word for it; interpret for yourselves. Does Isaiah not insist people seeking Messiah shall find a blessing of *eternal rest* in God? Listen to his words again:

*“Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit,* ***12****who caused* ***his glorious arm”*** – you know what this refers to? That’s right: messiah. And Isaiah continues: *“…to march at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble.* ***14****Like cattle that go down into the valley,* ***the spirit of the Lord gave them rest****. Thus, you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.”*

There is clear indication people’s search for salvation is about the promise of rest from our experience of weariness. As care-givers,

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as parents, as seniors struggling to hang on to life, as widows and widowers, as single persons without community, and anyone who knows the modern anxiety of a soul-grinding world-weariness; we know this comes from our experience of the negating forces of our world. We crave for “rest”; an eternal peace we may know in Jesus Christ and to which Paul commends us. Is this not Maplewood’s call to solidarity with others in search of rest because we ourselves know we need it?

We seek God’s “rest” yet how shall we know it? We know faith is not merely a private matter but reaches out to the world God has sent the Son to deliver and renew. We are blessed with an amazing facility and beautiful grounds in the heart of Châteauguay that may offer care-givers and seniors a place for “respite”, for meditation and rest from their burden. A sanctuary where people can find community and get to know our congregation. To watch an inspiring film, listen to good music and talk about matters of the heart, read with each other and offer a listening ear, a kind word and a little refreshment. Pretty much what we do during our fellowship luncheons but with help from people wishing to get involved so you yourselves need only to lend your support, sit back and enjoy. God’s compassion may be felt by those in need of respite, the promise of rest in God’s word of peace to us in Jesus Christ. Not an escape from the world’s neurosis but anxiety transfigured into respite through grace.

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Can we be a sanctuary of God’s name by giving those in need a place for “rest”? Is it not the original blessing of godliness? God finished Creating. God rested. And God blessed His work calling it “good”. Our relationship of grace to the Whole we call God’s Love.

In closing, I would like to offer two thoughts on the relationship between “respite care” and God’s “rest”.

First, “rest” has its source in visions of God’s glory but does not come automatically. It requires preparation once gifted to us after a time of our waiting upon God. Paul receives visions of God’s glory when he nears the end of his ministry while imprisoned in Rome. Clarity of vision comes after a time of struggle and waiting on God when faith is tested. Paul says God’s glory is perfected through our weakness. It’s a kind of strength not known in the world because it trusts in its own power and not in God’s strength. And the temptation for any of us is to succumb to a worldly-minded rhetoric, a modern-day *Pax Romana* that offers us “peace through power” because it fears giving up the need for control. Yet to be ruled by fear without courage to speak truth to power is an unforgiving prison of the soul.

“Respite” is not passivity in the face of loss of control in our lives, just like ‘rest’ means more than recuperation for our bodies. Motivation is the expression of energy flowing out from compassion for those in our care. There is an unspoken pressure

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we all live that subjects all human experience to verification (Douglas John Hall, *“Negative Theology”, 2013*). The storm and stress drain us of energy and from which we seek release. Respite-care comes in many forms but the need for it arises from a common experience: physical and spiritual exhaustion owing to pressures coming from society’s neurosis.

The second point in responding to this need is that we may develop a spirituality and pastoral theology around respite care. Let’s put some flesh on the skeleton of our vision for the Tea n’ Talk *Cinema-Café*. We affirmed it should serve as respite for seniors, care-givers and their close ones. Some might question this kind of thinking for after all, is *respite* not meant as a break from care-giving? To many, yes. And I know how important it is for care-givers to address feelings of guilt when they need rest. I counsel care-givers and family members who come looking for permission to care for themselves. In being a care-giver myself just like many of you, I too care for elderly parents and know the destructive power of guilt. But I have also learned from years of care-giving it also offers precious opportunity to slow down by focusing on what matters most and by adjusting my expectations in ways that may not have been possible otherwise. God’s timing is not in our control and what’s really needed is that we trust in His care of us. In key ways, it is not energy wasted but rest as gracious compassion in doing the simplest things like offering a

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drink of water or taking a parent to the bathroom. The little things take on an eternal significance because “every hair on our head is counted.” The theologian Douglas Hall taught me the most significant pastoral theology of our time is stewardship of life in the kingdom of death. He exemplified it in his lectures and especially from his role as care-giver to a loving wife who became wheelchair-bound after a fall. Just like my mom did. So, I share in your grief and why I feel this is important for all of us.

What if Maplewood is called to offer sanctuary to those in need of respite? To offer a time for laughter, release from a stifling routine, for fellowship with a faith-community helping people out of social isolation? Are we being called to transfigure “care-giver burnout” to families left without support? Can we countenance endless cuts to seniors and a dearth of care-giver services with God’s compassion and solidarity with the most vulnerable? What if God’s pledge to our inheritance is a ministry of respite care? What if God’s answer to our anxiety about Maplewood’s future is a blessing of peace deeper than the ocean and joy greater than the skies? And what if in our ministry and respite care outreach we envisioned God’s glory in Jesus Christ? Amen.

1. *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, ed. Frank C. Senn (Paulist Press, NY/Mahwah, US, 1986), pgs.62-62 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)