**Sermon 6/16/19**

**Ephesians 1:3-14 & 2:8-10**

Today is Father's Day, a day when we pause and remember,

            and honor, and thank, our fathers for being here for us.

Any fool can have a child. That doesn't make one a father.

It's the courage to cherish and raise a child which makes one a father.

A teen aged girl said: The greatest gift I ever had, came from God. I call him Dad.

So Happy Father's Day to all of you the amazing Dads.

A young boy gave us this definition of Father's Day:

            It's just like Mother's Day, only you don't spend so much.

He is probably right.

On Mother's Day, Moms receive flowers, and cards, and boxes of candy.

Dad often gets just a "soap on a rope."

Moms are often taken out to dinner at a fancy restaurant.

On Father's Day the family eats whatever Dad cooks on the backyard grill.

A good father is one of the most unsung, unpraised, unnoticed,

              and yet one of the most valuable assets in our society.

Father's Day is a time to celebrate all the superheroes in our lives,

          including stepfathers, grandpas, uncles, and other fatherly figures,

           those who put up with us, no matter what we did.

But what if you did not have a father,

           or even a mother, or aunts and uncles, cousins, or brothers or sisters?

Imagine yourself a child, abandoned on the streets of New York.

Your immigrant parents died on the ship on the way to America.

You have no money, and no relatives.

You can't speak English.

And you are left to fend for yourself.

As many as 30,000 orphans found themselves in exactly that predicament in 1850.

They slept in alleys, huddling for warmth in boxes or metal drums.

To survive, the boys mostly stole, caught rats to eat, or rummaged in garbage cans.

Girls sometimes worked as "panel thieves" for prostitutes,

            slipping their tiny hands through camouflaged openings in the walls

           to lift a watch or wallet from a preoccupied customer.

Immigrants were flooding New York City then,

          and no one had the time or money to look after the orphans,

         no one, that is, except Charles Loring Brace, a 26 year-old minister.

Horrified by their plight, he organized a unique solution, the Orphan Train.

The idea was simple: pack hundreds of orphans on a train heading west

         and announce to towns along the way that anyone could claim

         a new son or daughter when the Orphan Train chugged through.

By the time the last Orphan Train steamed west in 1929,

100,000 children had found new homes and new lives.

These orphans were adopted into a new life, a whole new way of living.

Two orphans from such trains became governors of their states,

            one served as a United States congressman,

            and another was a U. S. Supreme Court justice.

The Orphan Train provides a vivid parable of the message of Ephesians.

To capture Paul's enthusiasm in this book,

           imagine one more stage in your life as a street urchin in New York.

You have learned to survive and fight off starvation.

But one day, someone takes you and puts you on a smoke-belching train

               jammed with hundreds of other foreign speaking youngsters.

Three days later you are selected by a kindly middle-age couple in Michigan,

              who introduce themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford.

You are driven, in an automobile, to the largest house you have ever seen,

              and they quietly explain that you are now part of their family.

Everything they have is yours to use and enjoy.

At long last, by some miracle, you have a family and a home – and what a home!

Welcome to the Family!

Paul conveys a feeling something like that in Ephesians, a rich letter

            which expands the message of Jesus' parable of the Prodigal and His Brother.

A big "Welcome Home!" banner is stretched across the lawn,

           confetti swirls in the air, balloons lunge skyward, and a band plays.

Christians have been adopted directly into the family of God.

This is a good news book, to put it mildly.

If you feel discouraged, or wonder if God really cares,

             or question whether the Christian life is worth the effort, read Ephesians.

You will no longer feel like an orphan.

Paul describes the riches of Christ available to all, and points to us,

            God's adopted children, as his sparkling "Exhibit A" in all the universe.

Ephesians contains staggering thoughts.

Paul wants his readers to grasp the width, and length, and height, and depth,

               of God's never ending love for us.

He cranks up the volume to express that love,

             and not one low, mournful note sneaks in.

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints,

              and also members of the household of God.

For the discouraged, for those who feel abandoned and unloved,

          Paul's letter to the Ephesians is very good news.

In many ways, Ephesians is Paul's summing-up book.

The same subjects appear in greater detail in his letters to the

           Romans, Corinthians, and Thessalonians.

But in Ephesians, Paul gives an overall view of the grand scheme of the gospel.

Only now, Paul says, has God's hidden plan for all of history come to light.

Because it compresses such large thoughts into such a short space,

           Ephesians deserves very careful study.

It is good to read this letter slowly, digesting one short section at a time.

Taking your time will prove rewarding: Ephesians gives exuberant good news

           about the nature of the universe, and God's plan for believers.

As a converted legalist, Paul insisted on one fact of the gospel:

             eternal life comes not by any ritual of rule-keeping (which he called "works"),

             but by the grace of God.

It is given, never earned.

Yet he notes that God intends for us to do good works.

Paul makes a clear distinction:

             Good works do nothing to help us obtain God's favor,

             but they follow naturally as we experience the love of Christ.

As we do good works we begin to experience God's great love, peace, and joy.

When we were born, our Fathers did not love us because we loved them.

Our Fathers loved us simply because they loved us.

God's forgiveness is not given to us as a result of our love for God.

God loves us, and forgives us, simply because he loves us.

His love generates love in us toward Him, and toward one another.

The church in Ephesus brought great joy to Paul.

The Ephesians were well-grounded in the Christian faith.

In his letter to them Paul did not dwell on any urgent problems.

Instead he tried to raise the sights of these new Christians

           so they could fully grasp the extent of God's love, and grace, and joy.

As we read this letter, are hearts are lifted up,

         our thoughts are focused on heavenly things,

         and we begin to see all that our Heavenly Father has given us.

Abraham Lincoln was interviewed by a reporter shortly

             before the end of the Civil War. The reporter asked:

            “What are you going to do to those rebellious southerners after the war is over?

             How are you going to treat them when they come back into the United States?”

Lincoln replied "I will treat them as if they had never been away."

That's what God does for us when He forgives our sins.

He takes us back into His arms.

He treats us as if we had never been away.

AMEN