

Christmas 1, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Ephesians 1: 8 – 11

From St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1. The lector read from a translation other than the one in your bulletin this morning—that was my doing, and thank you by the way for obliging me. I pause, to read from that same translation now.

St Paul said, In all His wisdom and insight, God did what God intended to do. He made known to us "the secret plan" He had already decided to complete by means of Christ. This plan, which God will bring to final fulfillment when the time is right, is to bring all creation together—everything in heaven and everything on earth—with Christ as the head. All things are done according to God's plan; let us therefore praise Him for His glory.

The Word of God.

And now may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our spirits, all be acceptable in your sight this day o Lord our rock and our redeemer, AMEN.

We have plans. God has, The Plan, ok? We have plans, God has The Plan, now our plans are important, and good, and necessary. We can and should make plans for today, and a week from Thursday, and maybe for this summer already too. If you're a student you need to have a plan for your education, if you're a worker it would certainly be nice to have a plan for your retirement, if you are any body with any kind of responsibility in life whatsoever—you need to have a plan. We make our plans in life and do our very best to follow through on them, but we have to understand:

We have plans. God has, The Plan.

And The Plan, is Jesus Christ who died and rose again. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, to be born on Christmas Day. He was humble, He was obedient, He was faithful. He fed the hungry and cared for the sick, He shared the Good News of God! He died, on a cross, to forgive our sins, and then rose from the dead to save us. And when the time is right, He will be back, to bring all things in heaven and on earth to their proper fulfillment, Jesus Christ crucified resurrected coming again is The Plan for us, and for all creation. Jesus Christ is The Plan with a capital P, in which and by which all of our plans with a small p—take shape and grow.

Now what exactly does this mean, let me spell out a few implications of what St Paul in

Ephesians chapter 1 is and is not saying.

First of all, Paul IS saying, that Jesus Christ has been The Plan all along, even from before the beginning! “Even before the world was made,” it says in the lesson today. Before the beginning, before the world was made—Jesus Christ was, The Plan. In other words, God did not create the world, hoping people would stay in Eden. Oh, doggone it, they didn’t, well, let’s try Moses and the 10 Commandments, see how that works, oops! They messed that up too, well ok, finally. Finally, if all else fails, maybe Jesus, here’s hoping anyway—no. No. The cross is not a last, desperate throw of the dice. Instead, when God decided to create the world, the first thing God planned, was the cross and empty tomb. The cross and empty tomb is the cornerstone of all creation, it was in place first!—and everything else, galaxies guppies garbanzo beans, everything else—it was all created around the cross. It was all built upon the cross, and given purpose by the cross. That’s important for you, and the world—no cross. No creation.

Second, God’s Plan is NOT that you suffer. For that matter, God’s Plan is NOT that you experience great wealth or prosperity either. God’s Plan simply, is that you carry a cross yourself, and that you let your life be shaped by the cross.

God’s Plan is not that you suffer. I want to be clear, God is not sitting up there in heaven, devising accidents and creating diseases and scheming ways of making us cry. No—that is not our God. Nor frankly is God up there creating a Power Ball ticket with your name on it, ‘I’ll give it to you someday if you’re a nice enough person and go to church on Sunday’—that’s not it either. Instead, God created a world with choices and consequences, with freedom and possibility and potential, and God gave each one of us enough room to be human. God is not a control freak, God is not into dictating every detail of your life. God created a world and gave you a place in it, a world with choices and possibilities and consequences which are real! And God then simply said “Follow me. Pick up your cross, follow me, be shaped by me. I’ll go with you, no fear,” God said. “And we’ll see what happens, we’ll deal with it all together. Just let your life be guided and given shape by Me, and listen,” God says. “On the last day when the time is right, I’ll take you

home, just like I promised. Meantime, pick up your cross, and follow Me.”

God is not a control freak. God’s plan under girds and overarches your choices, it does not replace, your choices. God’s Plan gives meaning and direction to your plans, God’s Plan gives meaning and direction to your freedom and your responsibility. God’s Plan does not take away your freedom, or your responsibility. And in the end, best of all, God’s Plan works. My plans, your plans, our best efforts are hit and miss. You win some you lose some, that’s life, there are joys and there are pains. But God’s Plan works, that’s faith. That’s the promise. The cross, the empty tomb, the hope of that last great day, God’s Plan works. Jesus wins. And knowing that, believing that, we can work on our little plans for today and tomorrow too, safe and secure and at one with our Lord, both now and forever.

May it be so for all of us, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.