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"Figuring It (All) Out" The Rev. Garrett Lane (07/14/2024, The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost)

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, are strength and our redeemer. Amen. If you are anything like me, you might spend a little bit of your time or a lot of your time trying to figure other people out, trying to figure out your place kind of in the world. And even if you are a curmudgeon, even if you are one of the, and the Episcopal Church loves curmudgeons, come on. And I know you're out there and I love you. Thank you for waving at me. Yes. Even if you're a curmudgeon, you spend some of your time, I'm sure, trying to figure out your place and the social hierarchy, your relationship with the people around you, whether it's work, whether it's a hobby, whether it's the people that you live with. And you come to this point where if you could just, you tell yourself, if you could just figure out this one thing. If I could just get this one thing right, I think my relationship with my friend, with my spouse, with my workers. I think everything could get smoothed over if I just did this one thing right. Or if I had that special key, or if I could say those certain things or have that specific gift, I think that everything would be okay. And this is the cause and the source of so many movies, books and films and albums out there wanting to be understood and deeply desiring to want to understand other people. We get frustrated when we want to know someone better and it just isn't working. When you've been at a new job for eight months and you think that you've been talking, if you're familiar with the office, you think you've been talking with like a gym helper when in actuality you've been befriending Dwight Shrewd, who is this psychotic coworker with so

many issues. You're trying to figure out a new school. You're trying to figure out a new time in your life. You're trying to figure out a new relationship, but all of your friends keep calling your old boyfriend, or your new boyfriend, the old boyfriend's name or something like that. You get frustrated. We get frustrated because you want to know someone to know you better. You don't want your friends to call you before 9 a.m. on a Saturday. You don't want your spouse stacking bowls on the left side of the cabinet when they always are supposed to go on the right side. When you're driving, you don't want to see that person next to you pushing down the imaginary break as you're coming up on a stoplight. I don't know if you want that. I don't want that. We do this with God too. We do this with God too. Whether we like it or not, whether we're knowing it or not, we do this with God. We hear from people all the time about this kind of thing. It's kind of our job, so yeah, there's that. But I feel like I hear it often. People ask, who is God and what does God want with me? Who is God and what does God want with me? We're constantly trying to figure out God. Depending on how you grew up, depending on how you first came to faith, your ideas about who God is, really affects how the way you were raised, the things that were told to you, affect how you think of God even now into adulthood. So many people have God as this great ledger keeper. You have these conversations where you're trying to balance this ledger all the time or balance these scales. Well, if I drank a little bit last week, what do I need to do this week to kind of make up for that so that I can be okay with God? What are the chances I get caught if I do this and how can I rectify that situation? How far can this seemingly harmless relationship go before it turns into something that I think that I shouldn't be doing? So much of figuring out someone else is a guessing game. So much of being understood ends up being a guessing game as well. That album, that meal, that specific brand of carbonated water that you really like, that people just get you when they get it for you. And seeing where things go after those guesses get made,

there's always this
fear that's lurking around every corner of rejection, this fear that's
lurking around
every corner of God is going to do something to me that I really don't
want God to do.
Or worse, bad things are happening to me because of God. But that's
not what we hear in Paul's
letter to the Ephesians today, the beginning of Paul's letter to the
Ephesians. Paul tells
us that there is not this kind of cosmic guessing game with God. There
is not this sense of,
I need to just guess and figure it out and hope that I get it right
with God. God tells
us who God is. In this letter to the Ephesians, this was a letter that
was written and probably
passed around to many early Christian communities. And so it would be
like Kara getting a letter
from somebody holier than me, but I'm just going to say me, Kara gets
a letter. And it's
got some great things in it about Jesus, about God, about Christian
community. And the
Kara is at the Ephesian church and she's like, this is really good. I
think we should send
this to this church elsewhere. And they can be also affirmed by this
letter. And so that's
how a lot of these letters kind of start in the New Testament. That's
how a lot of them become
popular. And around the second and third and fourth centuries, you
kind of get these required
reading lists from these theologians or people that are important. And
Ephesians shows up on
many of these lists. It has general things to say and specific things
maybe to say about to
this community, but a lot of people can read it and still take away
some really important parts
about what it means to follow Christ and what it means to know God.
And as we read this letter,
as they read this letter, which is attributed to Paul, they what they
read encourages them. This
letter is now centuries old, has told us about the promises that God
has made to humanity, about
the promises God has made to the people of Israel and now to the
people today. Spoiler alert,
alert. There's a whole lot of grace. There's a whole lot of mercy and
you hear that every Sunday from
here. But Ephesians also has a lot about unity. Ephesians has a lot to
say about people coming
together in love and people coming together and following Christ.
Verse 10 talks about God gathering
all things, all creation to himself on heaven and on earth as one.

Verse 13 says, in him, you also,
when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation,
and had believed in him, or marked
with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, and that this mark is a
pledge of our inheritance
for redemption as God's own people. Paul wants these new Christians,
these fledgling Christian
communities and people that have heard or have ideas about God that
might need correction or
might need a new understanding. He wants people to hear this. He wants
people to know who God is
through Jesus Christ. And he says that. You know God because you know
Jesus Christ.

And he also wants to say that knowing Christ ties us together, knits
us together, binds us
together in this shared understanding of mercy and grace that we all
receive because we receive it
as an individual, but we also receive it as a y'all. We also receive
it as all of us kind of in this
room. All of us that are baptized, all of us that are here together
today. There isn't someone
who got baptized. I'm sure there is someone in this room that's been
baptized before. Everyone
else. I'm sure that we could we could figure it out, but that person
didn't get like an extra
bit of the Holy Spirit, and then as it kind of goes on until it gets
to like the people were
baptizing today only get a little bit. That's not at all what this
message, what God is about.

This Christian life and what Paul says is this mystery that God
reveals to the world about who
God is is revealed in Jesus Christ and in the work that Jesus Christ
has done. It is that we were
chosen in verse four before the foundations of the world to be holy
and blameless before him in
love, destiny us for adoption. This letter, what you hear from us on
Sundays, is not some cryptic
talk about who God is and what God says to you or what God wants with
you. It's not a secret. God
is not sitting up in some pillowy cloud lounging, sharpening lightning
bolts and watching your
every move ready to just start throwing things down so that you can be
humiliated before your
friends and family. No. God's not doing those things to you. God's not
putting that bottle on your
nightstand. God's not having those phone calls that you get from
people that you'd rather not be
calling you, reminding you of the hurt that they've inflicted upon
you. God's not hoping that you'll
be in those situations. God wants good things for you, for us, for

y'all. Paul talks about this in adoption and receiving this inheritance, part of which is coming together in unity. And what unifies us here, what unifies us regardless of background, regardless of views, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of anything, what unites us is that we are marked by the Holy Spirit in baptism. And I found out at the 730 service that our baptismal font, which is normally here, I pointed to it before I looked and then it's not there. It was nice. But it's not there, but I'm going to still talk about it. What is marked, Paul says in verse 13, in him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and you had believed in him, you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. That's what we do when we baptize babies and when we baptize adults here in this space. We come together, they are marked with water and the Holy Spirit is then upon them. And no, I don't have all of the answers and I'm teaching a class after this and I won't have the answers then too. But what I do have is a story about a recent baptism. Someone had received their child after getting it baptized. That sounds weird. But the child was baptized. And upon receiving the child, the dad talked to me after the service and was like, you know, when I got my baby back, it smelled really good. I know. And at first you're like, well, yeah, babies smell nice. They smell like little babies. Sometimes they smell bad. But yeah. But so here's what happens. After you are baptized, after that font, water gets put on you, we give a chrysum. It's an oil. We do it in the mark of the cross on someone's forehead, on the baby's forehead, on the adults forehead. And it's like a scented oil in some ways. And it goes back for centuries that this has happened to people after going through Christian initiation after being baptized. And so he received this baby and it was just kind of like something, something clicked for him. As so often, something does click when our senses are involved. When we smell the incense, maybe not at this church so much, but when we smell the incense, when we enter a church, when we taste bread and taste wine, when we use, when we hear the organ, when we hear beautiful solos, when the gifts of God are presented, when you're putting something physically in that plate. So much of our experience in this place is sensory. And for him, he

was lighting up because this theological connection of a good smell rising to the Lord in prayer and all sorts of other things that get tied in. Everything we do matters here and he was just making that connection and it was this lovely, lovely interaction. So when we get marked with that Holy Spirit, when we get marked with the chrysanthemum, when we are marked in baptism, we are marked as Christ's own, we are marked as God's own. And when we walk back into this church, when we come here together, it's a recognition that there are two realities happening kind of in our world. There are two things going on that we all experience, we all live in together with. One of those realities is this muddled up messiness, dirtiness of life that happens, it happens here, this place isn't just clean all the time, but it happens here, but it happens elsewhere too. This messiness of like I was talking about earlier, not being able to control yourself, not being able to control what other people do to you. This world of pain and suffering and sin, and I don't need to go on about it because you know it just as well as I do. So there's that world going on, that reality that we live in, and then there's another reality where there is joy, there is true life, and there is a sense of adoption, there's a sense of knowing of who God is, that God loves you and cares for you, and wants what's good for you, and does not want to punish you. There are these two realities that are going on. In Jesus plants his flag right in the middle, it's like a venn diagram in, boom, there's the cross, right in the middle of it. As a followers of Jesus Christ, that's where we find ourselves too. In this messiness of life that juts right up next to the beauty, and right up next to smelling that chryism on a newly baptized baby after the service, all of these things are next to each other, are lined up, and it's this wonderful appearances of the grace of Christ that show up, giving our world light and giving our world life. And we gather here together, all of these baptized followers who are marked with the Holy Spirit, and this messiness of life that so often comes unexpectedly on a Saturday when you've already got a sermon written. But you turn the TV on, and you know the messiness, the disunity, the fear, and the anxiety. We already have our feet in both of these worlds, both of these

realities.

And what we do when we come together today is we pray. We pray that we might know God better, and we're shown that we can know God better through the bread, through the wine, through baptism, and through what Paul tells us that God is for you, not against you, and that his son, Jesus Christ, who has given us grace and has done all of the work for us, is known here and is known elsewhere.

Thanks be to God. Let us pray.

Almighty God, we pray for our fear, we pray for our anxiety, we pray for

all of the messiness that overlaps with the goodness in this world that you've put us in.

Give us the strength to see you, give us the strength to hear your words, your tender words

of grace and of mercy through your son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.