

**1 Kings 3:4-15(ESV)** <sup>4</sup>And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. <sup>5</sup>At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” <sup>6</sup>And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. <sup>7</sup>And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup>And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. <sup>9</sup>Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” <sup>10</sup>It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup>And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup>behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. <sup>13</sup>I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. <sup>14</sup>And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” <sup>15</sup>And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

**Psalms 119:97-104(ESV)** <sup>97</sup>Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. <sup>98</sup>Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. <sup>99</sup>I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. <sup>100</sup>I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. <sup>101</sup>I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. <sup>102</sup>I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. <sup>103</sup>How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! <sup>104</sup>Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Nun

**Luke 2:40-52(ESV)** <sup>40</sup>And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. <sup>41</sup>Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. <sup>43</sup>And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup>but supposing him to be in the group they went a day’s journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, <sup>45</sup>and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” <sup>49</sup>And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” <sup>50</sup>And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup>And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup>And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Rev. Gary Lewis Hendrickson

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Lutheran Church

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas

# In or Out of Place?

**Ephesians 1:3-14(ESV)** <sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup>so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Whenever we see something highly unusual, it often sticks in our minds. Not only that, the unusual has a fascinating appeal. Sideshows have drawn multitudes to see their perception of unusual. From two-headed snakes to the bearded lady, seeing the unusual will draw a crowd. One time, I stopped at a freeway rest area. I noticed many people gathered in a circle apparently looking at something. Curious, I walked over to see what the attraction was. There was a man and woman, who had stopped by to rest, who had a pet African lizard—a little over three feet long. It was unusual, and everybody wanted to see this strange pet. I even took a picture of my wife petting the creature. I thought to myself, “Who in the world would want to have a pet like that crawling around the house?” But even though having a pet lizard did not appeal to me, I still took the time to look at the unusual—and to remember the event.

Unusual places also tend to remain in our minds. I remember a zoo I visited that was like no other I had ever seen. It was not a big zoo; it did not have hundreds of different species of animals; it was not particularly immaculate or messy. What made it unusual was that it was privately owned, charged admission, and a guided tour was provided for everyone who came. It was the first time that I had ever been given a tour guide through a zoo. Not only did the guide show us around, he also provided a verbal history of every animal in the zoo. He related the background of how he came to have that animal, TV commercials in which that animal had appeared, and other bits of trivia that made the tour interesting—and unusual.

Some of these animals had been hurt in accidents and brought to this zoo by Forest Rangers. Even after they healed, these animals were not able to fend for themselves in the wild; so, they became permanent residents of the zoo. Other animals had been donated by people who had them as pets they could no longer take care of. The Zookeeper had a Mountain Lion, a Tiger, a couple of large brown Bears, and an African Lion—all had been home pets at one time. Some animals had been confiscated by authorities for various reasons. Rather than putting these animals to sleep, they were brought to this private zoo.

Two of these confiscated animals were—as I remember—Arctic Foxes. There was some legality why they could not be pets—perhaps they were an endangered species, or something. They

were pretty animals and friendly. Their native home was high above the Arctic Circle, and they could exist quite nicely at 75 degrees below zero. But they did not do so well in the Phoenix apartment from which they were removed. In that desert city, the summer temperature climbs to about 120. These were cold weather animals with thick coats. When they became too warm, they emitted an odor that smelt like a skunk—or even worse, according to the complaining neighbors. They were unusual pets and probably drew much attention at first. But these foxes were Out of Place. They had turned out to be more of a nuisance than attention drawing pets.

## 1. Our Place Has Been Determined by God

There is a certain uncomfortable feeling when we are Out of Place. We want to feel that we belong—that we are where we are supposed to be. But where are we supposed to be? What is our place? Several times, the Apostle Paul deals exactly with these questions. The first part of our text today gives us an answer.

Way back before time even began—before the world was brought into existence—God chose all who would be with Him throughout eternity. Adam and Eve had not yet been created, but still God decided who would be saved. The eating of the forbidden fruit—original sin—was still in the future as God made His choices. No person had done anything right, or wrong, when God put names in the Book of Life. The name of every person who would be in heaven was included in the Book. The technical theological name for this process is called the Doctrine of Predestination—or the Doctrine of Election.

Confusion over this doctrine—this teaching—has plagued the Christian Church since the time of Paul. Man wants to place some reason behind the selection process that God used. For instance, someone came up with this idea: God looked into the future and determined who was good enough to deserve being saved. However good sounding that idea may be, the Scriptures give us no such indication. God simply chose based on His love—and that's it. Some have denounced God for being grossly unfair when He made the selection. These folks determined that God should have taken man's achievements into account before making the choice. Other analytical minds have deduced that because God chose some for salvation, He must have chosen others for damnation. Again, the Scriptures make no such statement.

What is perfectly clear is that God chose some to be saved. He made His choice in eternity—before time as we have come to know it. And the way that His plan is carried out in time is through Jesus Christ. Everyone who is saved will come to heaven through belief and trust in God's only Son. For us, who believe, our place has been determined by God. And that place where we will permanently reside is heaven.

## 2. The World Is Not Our Place

Christians—you and me—are on their way to heaven. God has ordained it. He brought us to faith—and He will keep us in the faith. The world is a temporary residence for us. We live here, but the world is not our place. We belong to the heavenly realm—to God's heavenly kingdom. We are Out of Place here on earth. Like the Arctic Foxes in Phoenix, we were not meant to live here permanently.

Yet, we do not like feeling Out of Place. Thus, we often attempt to blend in. We try to pretend that we are native to the area—that we belong here. It is too uncomfortable to be unusual—something

within us wants to fit in. But just like a quarter will not fit in the dime slot of a vending machine, we aren't going to fit in here, either. We have been made different by Christ; we are Out of Place in the world. Sure, we can fool some of the world's natives by acting like them—pretending that we haven't been chosen by God. Sometimes we can get by with our little charade for quite some time. But the time comes for every Christian when the pretense falls apart—when we start acting like who we are—when we stand apart from the natives of the world.

Now, you may be thinking, what about so-and-so? He is doing a rather good job of blending in with the world; he is not standing apart from them; he isn't acting like a Christian. Maybe so. Maybe he will change, or maybe he is not a believer. Maybe he is acting like a native of the world because he is. Maybe he still has not come to faith. But more to the point, what about us? We know who we are; we know that we are different; we know that we are not part of this world. When—in the model of Jesus Christ—we act like we are Out of Place in the world, we're In Place with God.

### 3. Jesus Christ Came to Assure Our Place

Jesus came to assure us that our place is heaven. That is what Christmas is all about. The plan of salvation has not changed since God predestined some to life eternal. That plan has always been Jesus Christ. He is the Way—the only Way to heaven. He was born in the flesh to effect salvation for sinful man. His goal—His purpose—was to make us holy and blameless in the sight of God. He did that by completely obeying His Father's will, by enduring the scorn and torturing he received from mankind, by giving His life on the cross, by defeating sin, death, and the devil when He rose out of the grave. He is the living and loving proof that God's predestination will happen.

The Bible's teaching on Predestination is supposed to be a comfort to us. It is not meant to make us worry as to whether we are one of the predestined ones, or not. Rather, this teaching reveals to us that God's love was reaching out to us long before we were ever born. It was not our goodness or self-worth that prompted God to choose us. No, it was His goodness—His love—that led Him to choose you and me. He wants us to be with Him forever. The God we know has stated His love for us—He has proven His love for us. He wants us to be assured, in Christ, that He has been expecting us in heaven for a long, long time.

Our response to God's election—to His love—is to show love—just like the saints did in Ephesus. Paul had heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints. Our faith in the Lord Jesus and our love for all the saints is to be well known, also. When we act Out of Place in the world, we make it known that we are In Place in heaven. Like the out of place Arctic Foxes, we may seem like a nuisance to the world—or in courser language, the world may think we stink. But our faith is in Jesus; our hope is in God's goodness; our place is with God. And we act accordingly for everyone to see.