

YOU'RE ALL RIGHT

Last Sunday we celebrated America's 245th birthday.

Our nation's history has been a mix of highs and lows, successes and failures, joys and sorrows, rights and wrongs, accomplishments we can be proud of, and things we've done that we should be humbled by and seek repentance for.

One of the things we Americans seem to be most proud of is our self-reliance—that rugged, pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps, individualist mentality that has been a part of the fabric of our country since its founding in 1776.

We like thinking of ourselves as self-made men and women. If you're like me, it's hard to ask anyone for help because it seems like a sign of weakness. Almost as if we're doing something wrong.

What? You can't do that by yourself?

Dependency is looked upon as a human fault.

In this morning's reading from his letter to the Ephesian church, the Apostle Paul spoke of something that we haven't done for ourselves, and will never be able for ourselves.

It's an achievement we're absolutely dependent on someone else to do for us, and we can't accomplish on our own, no matter how hard we work at it, and no matter how much earnest effort we put into it.

Whatever else we have been able to achieve through our shrewd maneuvering, burning the midnight oil or by good old fashioned luck, there is one thing we will never be able to earn or achieve on our own.

Paul was writing about our salvation, our relationship with God. And he opened his letter with, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

How has God blessed us?

Paul said, "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. . . . God predestined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ. God forgave our sins "in accordance with the riches of God's grace that God lavished on us."

Notice who was doing all this, who was taking all the action.

Not us, but God.

It sounds so simple and straightforward, yet sometimes it's so hard to accept, that we have nothing to do with God loving us, and nothing to do with God saving us.

We have done nothing to deserve the blessings we have received.

We can't take any credit for being considered worthy enough to get into the Kingdom.

It's all God's doing.

I wonder how many of us here this morning are under the impression that being here in church makes us favored in God's eyes.

I wonder if some of us believe that worshipping God like we're doing now is sort of like rubbing a magic lantern to make God the genie appear and makes God more willing to grant our wishes.

Does attending worship on Sunday morning make us better people?

Not always. Sometimes the most regular church-goers are the least Christian people.

The good news is, God loves even those least Christian people, and His will is for them to act more like the Christians they profess to be.

And the only real incentive those less than Christian acting people have to act more Christian is because God loves them anyway.

God loves them the way they are and adopted them as His children, sins and all, which is powerful motivation for them to become the way God wants them to be, because it stems from deep gratitude and reciprocal love.

So, let me say it again this way. Christians like us gather in church on Sunday mornings like we're now doing, not to get somewhere with God and earn God's love, but to praise God for the love God has already shown us in Jesus Christ.

We're blessing God right now, today with our songs and prayers, and we hopefully bless God on Monday through Saturday at the office or at home or at the grocery store or behind the wheel of our car, because God has first blessed us, chosen us, adopted us, forgiven us, and loved us.

Occasionally when I'm driving, usually when I'm in the more rural areas of Maine and New Hampshire, I'll see a sign posted in front of a house that has an ominous message like, GET RIGHT WITH GOD!

The people who write such signs have the best of intentions, I'm sure. They want the people who drive by their homes to read them and be spurred to live a more godly life.

They're offering a warning to those who need a little kick in the pants to do what they need to do to clear up their accounts with the Almighty, because, you know, they might blow a tire, careen off the road, hit a tree and meet their Maker without having made things right.

But if the Apostle Paul was around today, and he drove by that house with that somewhat threatening, fear-inducing sign, I imagine him pulling into the driveway, knocking on the door and having a little conversation with the writer of that message.

"Sir or Ma'am," he might say, "your sign has it wrong. Christians like us worship, serve, obey, pray and sing praises to God, not because we're afraid that God is angry with us and we need to get right with Him and clean up our act or else.

"No, we worship, serve, obey, pray and sing praises to God because we have already been made right with God, not by our own efforts, not by anything we have done or can do, but because of God's love for us through God's gift of Jesus Christ.

So you may want to change your sign to say, IN JESUS CHRIST YOU HAVE BEEN MADE RIGHT WITH GOD. NOW, GO ACT LIKE IT.

Yes, never forget that you're all right. And you have been all right before you were even born. And that's the reason you're here today. So we can say together, in prayer and song, , "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Thanks be to God. Amen.