

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 11-12, 2009
Ephesians 1:3-14

“The Riches of His Grace”

He was born sometime around the year 1680, probably in or near the port city of Bristol, England. However, little of his early life can be verified for certain. Even his name is not known for sure: some say Edward Teach, or Edward Thatch, or Edward Drummond. He could read and write, something that many could not at that time, so it is assumed that he came from a wealthy family who could afford to educate him. After serving with the British navy in the West Indies, he turned to piracy, and became known as Blackbeard because of the enormous black beard that nearly covered his face. It is said that he wove long wicks and fuses into his beard and under his hat, lighting these when going into battle and seizing other ships, enshrouding him in a smoky haze that made his appearance seem truly fiendish. His very name and reputation were enough to strike terror into the hearts of sailors and shipmen. Blackbeard's career as a pirate lasted only a few short years. On November 22, 1718, he was killed in battle with Lt. Robert Maynard of the British Royal Navy at the southern tip of the Outer Banks of North Carolina, a place off Ocracoke Island that has come to be called “Teach's Hole,” a channel that connects the Atlantic Ocean and Ocracoke Inlet with the deeper waters of Pamlico Sound. The point of land near Teach's Hole is today known as Springer's Point Nature Preserve, and it is here that some say Blackbeard's buried treasure is still buried. To this day, no large treasure chest of gold has ever been found. So, when my family spent this past week at the Outer Banks of North Carolina and traveled down to Ocracoke, it's hard not to think about Blackbeard's buried treasure. Fact or fiction? Perhaps we'll never know.

When we think of riches, this is usually what comes to mind: riches like buried treasure, gold, jewels. Or, more modern-day riches like stocks, bonds, and CDs. But there is a different kind of riches that God would have us know about – the riches of his grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul the apostle is talking about in today's Second (Epistle) Lesson, and it is a treasure of infinitely greater value than anything Blackbeard or anyone else could ever fathom. Our summer preaching series, “Walking by Faith,” continues today as we focus on these opening verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians under the theme, “The Riches of His Grace.” May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

It's interesting to note that in the original language of the New Testament the verses from Ephesians 1:3-14 form one very long unbroken sentence. In fact, this is the longest sentence in the entire New Testament! And it is here that Paul uses some very powerful verbs to describe the riches of God's grace – of all that He has freely and graciously done for the sake of people who are trapped in the brokenness and poverty of sin. Take out your worship bulletin and follow along with me. In verse 3, Paul describes how God “...**has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...**” In verse 4, he goes on to write how God “...**has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.**” In verse 5, he continues with how God “...**has destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ...**” In verse 6, Paul speak of God's “...**glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.**” In verse 7, he speaks of how in Christ God “**has lavished on us [redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace].**” And in verse 9, how God “...**has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ.**” These are powerful descriptors and all point to what God has done in Christ: blessed, chosen, destined, bestowed, lavished, and made

known to us the riches of his grace. Brothers and sisters in Christ, do not take this precious gift for granted! Familiarity does indeed breed contempt, and it is all too easy for us who have received this gift by God's amazing grace to disregard it and not take it seriously. There are countless millions around the world, including people in our own neighborhoods, who have never heard of the riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ. By outward appearances they may be successful people who seemingly have it all, but there is an emptiness and longing within them. They, too, are people for whom Christ died upon the cross, and they need to hear of the riches of his grace. This true and lasting treasure is found only in Christ, and this is why Paul hammers this point home again and again here in Ephesians 1 – eight times in these verses! It is only in Christ that we have the riches of God's grace.

But what exactly is grace? Simply put, grace is God's undeserved love and forgiveness. In our brokenness and sinfulness, we have no claim upon God. We do not earn God's acceptance, his favor and his grace. We cannot buy this through good behavior or the works that we do. We don't merit or deserve God's grace. It comes to us only as a gift, freely given, received by faith. Ask our Confirmands what grace is and they will tell you: grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. My friends, this is the real treasure. But like any treasure, it is of no use to us until we draw upon it and start using it. She went down in history as America's greatest miser, and yet when she died in 1916, Hetty Green left an estate valued at over \$100 million – an astronomical sum of money in those days. She regularly ate cold oatmeal because it cost money to heat it. Her son had to suffer a leg amputation because she delayed so long in looking for a free clinic. She was wealthy beyond imagination, yet she chose to live like a pauper, and she is an illustration of many Christians today. We have limitless wealth, the riches of God's grace at our disposal, yet so often we live like spiritual paupers. Isn't it time that we started drawing on the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus? None of us knows what tomorrow will bring, but we do know that no matter what happens our future is secure and our inheritance is certain, made secure and certain through the blood of Jesus Christ shed upon the cross at Calvary. Let us not be the Hetty Greens of the Church – spiritual misers, hoarding the riches of God's grace to ourselves. Rather, let us lavishly and freely share the riches of God's free grace in Christ Jesus, giving of ourselves, our time, and our possession, all of the sake of God's mission to the world. May God make it so for Jesus' sake. Amen.