

## **Meant for More Through You (Eph. 1:11-14)**

**Chris Altmann – February 28, 2010**

Recently, the New Orleans Saints won the National Football League's Super Bowl. It is the most important professional football game in the United States. And the Saint's win is all the more remarkable given where their road to victory began. After being founded in 1967, the Saints went more than a decade before they finished a season with a .500 record. Ten years of games passed before the team managed a season in which they won half their games. In addition, it was two decades before the Saints celebrated a winning season. They played twenty years before they had one season in which they won more than they lost. In fact, in 1980, the Saints lost their first 14 games. A local sportscaster urged Saints fans to wear paper bags over their heads. Many of the bags had written on them the word "Aints" rather than the team's name, "Saints." And even after their first winning season, it would be another two decades before the Saints made it to this year's Super Bowl. The end of their story is all the more amazing given its humble beginnings.

The same is true regarding the story Paul's been telling in Eph. 4. During this Sunday morning series, "Meant for More," we've been exploring the more we are meant for in Christ:

- *Paul has revealed that we Christians are now part of a community meant for more than just this—more than just the ordinary routine of every-day life. Instead, as Christians we are part of a community that participates in a cosmic restoration process. We get to join God in putting the pieces of people's lives and of all creation back together.*
- *Paul has also revealed that we who have faith in Jesus are now part of a community meant for more than just me—more than just loneliness or relationships which revolve around me. Instead, as people with faith in Jesus we are now part of a contrast community in which real and deep relationships thrive.*
- *Paul has revealed that we Christians are now part of a community meant for more than just "us" and "here." Instead, as Christians who confess that God is Father of all and that he is working through all creation, we belong to a community that places no limits on God's love and labor and places no limits on our own love and labor.*
- *Paul has further revealed that we who have faith in Jesus are now part of a community meant for more than just religion. We who have faith in Jesus are part of a community pursuing increased intimacy with and imitation of Jesus Christ.*
- *And finally, Paul has revealed that we Christians are part of a community meant for more than just sitting in the stands. Every Christian has been given an ability to do the work of ministry which impacts people's lives.*

All of this is ours as Christians. God has invited us into this amazing community of "more."

But that community of "more" is even more amazing given its humble beginnings. In Eph. 1:11-14 Paul reminds us of our beginning: *11In 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, 12so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13In 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, 14who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:11-14 ESV).*

For a brief moment, Paul speaks about how he, and others like him, took their first steps into this community of “more”: *11In 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, 12so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.* Verses 11-12 are about Paul and other Jews who were some of the first to put their hope in Christ. Paul says that for him and for other Jews, this community of “more” began when they put their hope in Christ.

But in verse 13, Paul moves from “we” to “you”: *13In 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, 14who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.* The “you” refers to the Ephesians, and more largely to the non-Jews or Gentiles in Ephesus. How did they become part of this amazing community of “more”? Here’s how it began: *13In 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.* These formerly pagan Gentiles were now part of the great community of “more.” But how did they get there? Paul mentions three parts of their beginning. *First, they heard.* The Ephesians heard about Jesus. Paul travelled to Ephesus and spoke to them this “word of truth” about Jesus. It all began when Paul started talking to them about Jesus and they heard about Jesus.

*Second, they believed.* Once Paul shared with them the story of Jesus, they wrestled with it, dialogued about it, and processed it. And eventually, they believed it. They trusted it was true. It all began when one morning or one late night their hearts and minds finally decided that this “word of truth” really was true.

*Third, they were sealed.* Paul writes that they were *sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.* In the ancient world, cattle and slaves were branded with their owners seal. It was a mark of ownership and way of protecting them. Someone of ill-will might leave something alone if they recognized on it the seal of an important owner. Paul’s not calling us cattle or slaves. But he is saying that when the Ephesians heard about Jesus and believed in Jesus, they were sealed, marked, or branded by the Holy Spirit. God took possession of them. He took ownership of them.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Paul calls this Spirit the “promised” Holy Spirit should cause our minds to go back to Acts 2 when Peter preached about how God had promised in the Old Testament to “pour out” his Spirit on “all people.” Then, later in Acts 2, 3,000 are baptized and receive the Spirit. Thus, Paul is reminding the Ephesians about the day when they were baptized and they received this Spirit. They heard about Jesus, believed, and were sealed by the Spirit when they were baptized. It all began when they got immersed in a pool of water. This amazing community of “more” began in that humble way: when they heard, and believed, and were sealed.

The same is true for every one of us who follows Jesus. Our first steps into this community of more began when we heard, believed, and were sealed. Do you remember the name or names

of the people who shared with you the word of truth about Jesus? Maybe it was parents, a preacher, or a friend. For me, it was Gary Cox, a high school senior and Marlon McWilliams, a rural small-town preacher. Do you remember those days when you started taking seriously what you had heard about Jesus, when you really began considering that it might be true? For me, it was the first few months of 1984. The story of Jesus got into my heart and wouldn't let me alone. And do you remember the day of your baptism? Do you remember who spoke the words: "I baptize you into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"? That's how all of this began.

With that in mind, listen to how Paul closes Ephesians: *To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph. 6:18-20ESV)* Paul wants to proclaim the good news about Jesus. He wants to share it with boldness and courage. He wants that so much that he begs the Ephesians to pray for him as he tells others about Jesus. As Paul wraps up the letter what matters most to him is his mission of sharing Jesus with other people.

Why? Because Paul knows that this is how it begins. Paul wants every person to participate in this community of "more." He wants every person to know the joy of living for more than just this, and just me, and just us, and just religion, and just sitting in the stands. And Paul knows that this is how that begins: someone has to share the story of Jesus, so that another person can hear, believe, and be sealed by the Holy Spirit.

The reality is that there are millions around the world and thousands in the Mid-South who are not a part of the community of "more." And the only way they become a part is the way the Ephesians became a part: they must hear this word of truth, believe in it, and respond to it through baptism, being sealed by the Holy Spirit. If you have not done that, you are not a part of the community of "more." You need to begin this morning by believing in the word about Jesus and responding to it through baptism. That's why Paul could think of nothing else at the end of this letter than telling others about Jesus. Because that's where it all begins.

But it may be tempting to leave Ephesians and assume that only a trained professional like Paul can help others begin this journey. We might close the last chapter and assume that only someone like an apostle can share Jesus well-enough for others to hear, believe, and be sealed. But if we take the Ephesian's story back one more chapter, we'll see that this is not the case.

The very first Christians lived in the city of Jerusalem. But there came a day when many of them were driven out of Jerusalem. Here's how Luke records it: *And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. (Acts 8:1 ESV)*. Notice what happens: the apostles—the spiritual elite—remain in Jerusalem. But average and ordinary Christians get run out of town. And notice what these ordinary and average Christians do: *19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia*

*and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:19-21 ESV).* Some of these average and ordinary Christians who had been run out of Jerusalem make their way to a city called Antioch. They are so average that Luke doesn't even name them. These Christians aren't even important enough to be named. But in Antioch, these nameless and ordinary Christians share the word of truth with Jews and Gentiles. And many of these Jews and Gentiles hear the word, believe the word, and are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Luke says "a great number" of them do. Then, they form a church. And it is that church in Antioch which ultimately sends Paul to places like Ephesus where the word is preached and the Ephesians hear, believe, and are sealed. The real beginning to what Paul has shared in Ephesians is right here in Acts 11: ordinary, unnamed Christians sharing the story of Jesus.

The point is that for every person, the journey into this community of "more" begins in the same way: it begins by hearing, believing, and being sealed through the waters of baptism. And who does God use to bring about that beginning? For sure, he uses seasoned preachers like Paul. But God also uses ordinary and average Christians like us. Through you God can create a beginning for the people in your class, in your neighborhood, at your work, and in your family. You can share that word of truth so that the people around you can enter into this community of "more."

How? There are a lot of different ways. But one way is demonstrated by what we are calling "throughYOU." "ThroughYOU" is based on how Jesus himself enlisted people into his community of more. We've handed out a description of it this morning. I'll share some of it with you. In Matt. 5-10 Jesus demonstrates the four simple ways in which God can work *through you* to lead people into this community of "more":

1. Cultivate the **Character** of Jesus. In Matt. 5-7, also known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to not merely *tell* others good news, but to *become* good news. His Sermon reveals that we become salt and light through who we are and not just through what we say. If every person at Highland became a living example of Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5-7, that alone would attract others to Jesus.
2. Pursue **Closeness** like Jesus. In Matt. 8-9, Jesus leaves the summit where he's retreated with his followers and draws close to people who are far from God. He touches them, serves them, and befriends them. Every one of us needs to find ways to get onto the "turf" of people far from God and to draw close to them. Simply put, more of us need to start spending more time around non Christians.
3. Initiate **Conversations** about Jesus. In Matt. 8-10, Jesus shares good news about himself. Then he sends his followers to share that good news with others. Every one of us can initiate conversations about Jesus with people around us. We need to start talking to people about Jesus once again. If you'd like some guidance on how to do this, look for the web address on the Sermon Notes section of the Link. At that address you'll find three resources to help you tell others about Jesus.

4. Invite them to participate in the **Community** of Highland. Leading people to Jesus is not a solo activity. It requires community. At some point, you'll want to invite that individual to participate in the community of Highland. This community has four primary expressions: ministry, worship, Sunday School, and Reach Groups. You'll want to invite someone to participate in one or more these expressions.

These are the four practices through which God can lead people through you to faith in Christ.

We believe there are certain habits which can help you live out these practices. Those are listed on the handout. And, during the next year, we're planning several specific activities to help you live out these practices. Those are also listed.

Pat Wilemon is long-time Highland member. For several years Pat and her husband Bud have coordinated the Welcome Center prior to worship at Highland. Pat is a seasoned Christian with a sincere faith. But she had never talked at length about Jesus with a non Christian until several weeks ago. Pat decided to take a step of faith and ask her neighbor to study Jesus' story with her. Her neighbor said "yes." And a few days ago, Pat shared that her neighbor was thinking of being baptized into Christ. A new beginning—and it all started when an ordinary Christian started talking about Jesus. Let's watch this video of Pat **[VIDEO]**.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, Ephesians Word Biblical Commentary (Word, 1990): 39.