

2024-07-14 ... 10am Morning Worship Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

**Ephesians 1**

I thought we would treat ourselves this morning by splurging on the full-blown joy of the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians. Paul can scarce contain himself with the wonder of what God is offering us and that out pouring is incredibly just one sentence – the longest in the Bible!

But let's back track a bit. I am one of your representatives on the governing body of the Infant and Junior Schools and last week I was reading through the paperwork for the summer term meeting. There was a lot of it! I always start with the headteacher's report – the head is the pivot of the school, they lead the culture and the standards for both the staff and the pupils. They establish the priorities, decide what is most important at any one time.

**Our schools are big schools** – 12 classes in the Juniors – so lots of teachers, many of them undertaking extra responsibilities as they progress their careers. So attached to the many pages of the headteacher's report there were lots of different reports setting out all the different projects that have been underway in the last year to make the schools better learning environments, better working environments, all with the aim of helping every child flourish, academically but also socially.

Naturally, as these were reports to the Governors, whilst including some plain speaking they displayed full enthusiasm in talking about the effort which had been expended and the benefits that had been seen.

That same afternoon I read this passage of Paul's for the first time to prepare for this morning. I felt like I was in a continuation of the same force of energy, the same excitement, the same encouragement.

And as I've thought about it, the shaping of a school seems to me to have many similarities with the way God shapes his family. We are talking about an adult and child relationship with a figure in overarching control seeking to create a loving family environment where everyone can be their best self, learning from others, learning for themselves, and sharing the love that they receive.

The children who arrive at the school are not generally there of their own choice or volition, someone else signed them up for it. They may not want to be there, may not understand why they are being asked to behave in the way they are and buck against it. Nonetheless they benefit from all that is on offer.

**Only when they fully buy into it for themselves**, when the penny drops and they discover the wonder of learning, the wonder of being kind to each other and having friends, that they truly become full participants in this particular world. And some of them will in due course become teachers themselves eager to put themselves out for the next generation of children, to teach them about the valuable space that they occupy in society.

Paul speaks of the wonder of being chosen ahead of our time to be part of the community of God, how every spiritual blessing is there waiting to be poured on us when we sign ourselves up as followers of Christ, when we accept our adoption as his children. Kindness and grace are there for us, poured upon us whether we notice or not.

**We are part of God's plan** – this is the verse we sing in Our God is a Great Big God – how wonderful to be a part of God's amazing plan – showing God's glory as all things in heaven and earth are brought together. And our full receipt of the Holy Spirit at the moment that things click for us – that is the sign that tells us that God's promises are true. The more we learn, the more we grow in our knowledge of God, the more exciting, the more incredible and yet more credible, that gift will seem

Let us, as Paul did, offer blessings and praises for our life in Christ, truly wonderful, unasked for, undeserved, but there for the taking. Be joyful my friends for our God is good. Tell those who do not know this, be excited, rejoice, and give thanks.