

5 Pentecost 2003
"Your Potential, God's Passion"
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Last week's New Yorker magazine has a clever ad from Microsoft. The slogan for Microsoft is, "**Your potential. Our passion.**" They have a goal for your potential. "We see a company with YOUR name on it." Partner. That's a nice thought isn't it?

The ad shows a young man pushing a cart of legal documents through the offices of a law firm called Monahan Feld. The name is posted in bold letters on the wall behind him. **Then the ad gets clever.** An artist has taken this picture and sketched onto the outlines of the future. The artist transforms the man's document cart into a lectern. And on each side an attentive audience has been drawn. And on the wall behind him his name LIPSKY has been added to the name of the firm, in big block letters.

Young Mr. Lipsky will be partner someday and Microsoft is going to help him. "We're passionate about creating software to help you realize those grand ambitions." Wow! Software. You know...PowerPoint and Excel. Though it overstates the efficacy of *software*, I like the way this ad evokes **the powerful potential we have as human beings and the importance of unlocking it.**

Microsoft tries to do it by creating software. Our Epistle lesson this morning shows us a different way. Like the ad, Paul takes a picture of our mundane, every day lives and sketches the outlines of our identity and potential for the future. He describes God's passion for bringing that potential to full bloom in us. He shows us 1) Where we are, 2) What we have and 3) What its all for. Let's look at each.

First, Paul shows us where we are. "Location, location, location..." that's how they say it, right? **Where you are says a lot about your status and prospects** in life. Just think of your office. Are you in a cubicle or do you have the corner office with the great view? Or do you work at home?

Or think of where you live. Loudoun is the second wealthiest county in the nation and that says something about us – not just that our housing is overpriced. It takes a lot to move here and make it outside of Washington.

Location, location, location... Well, Paul *locates* us as Christians. He tells us where we live, and it's a location that's off the map. Where are we? We are "in Christ" as Paul tells us TEN different times in this passage. There's no zip code, but it's quite a location isn't it? **It shapes our identity and our potential in life.**

So what does it mean to be "in Christ"? I'll put it simply for you. God saves us from sin and evil and death by putting us in Christ. Through baptism and faith in

Jesus, by repenting and embracing Jesus, by coming forward and eating his body and blood, God has mysteriously joined us to Jesus, making us ONE with him. This has enormous influence in our lives once we grasp it. Being in Christ means that **what is true of Jesus is now true of you and me.**

He's given us his all. He became poor that you might be made rich. What is true of Jesus is true of you. When you're in this location, standing on this spot "in Christ", you can say "I'm with him" and the doors fly open. You are under his protection and provision. Jesus takes you into himself and brings you before God.

Let me ask you something. **Do you realize that?** When you think about your life, your position and stance, your self-image and ambitions do you think of yourself "in Christ" with all that you have in him? That brings us to the second point.

Paul shows us what we have. **Your possessions say a lot about you.** Your car, your clothes, your investment portfolio, your fancy toys and your name brand accessories proclaim your sense of yourself and where you're headed.

And advertisers, like Microsoft, target that. They try to impart a sense of purpose and identity and meaning from the products they sell. Yesterday I opened a new tube of toothpaste emblazoned with "Fresh Confidence". So now they're selling confidence toothpaste tubes! It's Colgate, by the way – in case you need to buy some confidence this week.

Paul wants us to look at our stuff differently. Since we are in Christ, we have all that Jesus gives us. What's his is ours. He says, "God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Now I want you to say that with me: EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING.

What does that mean? It means that God's loving intention, his, magnificent favor, generosity and good will is focused on you. He loves you and has given his beloved Son in order to bring you back and embrace you. What else can he give?

As my old friend Kevin Langan and I used to say in high school, **it's a veritable corn-u-COPIA of good things**, pressed down, shaken together and overflowing into our lap. It's like a giant piñata breaking open or a slot machine dropping the jackpot in your lap. It's more than we can handle.

So Paul unpacks the concept for us. He names some of the blessings. God has given us a destiny and adopted us as children. He's forgiven our sins and made known to us the mystery of his will. He's given us an inheritance and he's given us the Holy Spirit.

This is pretty familiar stuff, but do you see how these things immeasurably enhance your life and open a whole new horizon of your potential? **Do you see God's passion for your potential?** You don't NEED products from Microsoft or

Colgate for fame or “fresh confidence.” God has blessed you with every blessing. **But why has God done this for us?** That brings us to the third point.

Paul shows us what its all for. He lets us in on the secret of God’s ambition, his goal, his passion for the future. Just like your location and possessions, **your ambition says a lot about you.** What are you after? What do you want to achieve? Think about it. What do you pursue in your dreams? I guarantee that shape’s your identity and potential in life.

There are as many pursuits as there are people, but they break down into some general categories. People want to get rich, be loved, be admired, feel good, look good, have power and be safe. And they will bend their all to obtain them.

Well Paul describes a very different goal and ambition for us as Christians. Paul tells us three times – repeatedly hammering the point home – the ultimate he wants us to share with him. It’s all [open envelope] “to the praise of his glory.” **God’s passion is for his praise.** He’s doing all this to bring praise to himself.

Does that sound selfish? What does it mean? It means that God is a deeply happy about being God. He loves who he is and what he does. Think of God’s “glory” as the beauty of his manifold perfections, the light of love shared by Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It’s the most beautiful thing in the cosmos.

God’s glory, his perfection and love, is therefore uppermost in God’s own affections. Everything God does is to preserve and display that glory and to gather others to join him in delighting in his glory. He wants company. That’s what we gather here every week to do in the liturgy. **He wants us to join him in delighting and rejoicing** and finding hedonistic pleasure in his glory.

That’s why he made us. **That’s the glorious potential God BUILT INTO us** and is trying to unlock. And you know what? That’s the deepest desire of our hearts. Sure, we hunger for all these other things, but in the end they’re just empty substitutes for GLORY.

So this is our identity, our location our potential “in Christ” that Paul sketches into the picture of our lives. **God has done everything necessary** to unlock that potential, to help us love and praise his glory over all else. He has chosen us in Christ, he has blessed us with everything he has and he’s called us to join him in rejoicing in his glory.

We just need to respond daily to it. There’s a prayer I pray every day, sometimes several times a day that gets to the heart of it for me. Let us pray. “Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you and then use us we pray, as you will and always to the praise of your glory and the benefit of your people. AMEN