

St. John's UCC, Fredericksburg
July 15, 2012

**“A Clean Slate”
(Ephesians 1:3-14)**

One of the greatest contemporary examples of what redemption means is the old green stamps. I am sure most of you remember them....I even remember them! I remember fondly going to Weis market with my grandmother, Dot Rankin, and receive her green stamps. We would then go to another place in order to redeem her books of green stamps. For any of our young folks here, let me explain what this is all about. Certain stores would give you so many trading stamps for each dollar you spent at their store. After saving up on the stamps you would then go to the redemption center and trade in the stamps for something you wanted. The transaction had two parts: purchasing the right of redemption and then claiming your merchandise. You buy the right of redemption when you make your original purchase and the store gives you stamps as a token. Then you take those stamps to the redemption center. The items you redeem are not free, because in reality you already paid the price for them when you made the original purchase.

In the same way, God—through Christ's blood—has already purchased us from the power of sin, and we are redeemed. Yet God does not have to come for his merchandise immediately. Instead, he has given us a token of our redemption, the Holy Spirit. So we have redemption: the forgiveness of sin.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians about God's redemption through Christ. The most important thing that Paul says in this letter is that God's redeeming love is for all! It is not just given to certain people, but it is God's gift to everyone! This is a very

important message for us today because we live in a world where we want to say that the love and grace of God is limited to us! It disturbs me when faithful church people make bold declarations, in the name of Christ, that certain people can't be forgiven....they can't receive God's love and grace! They make these proclamations and say that they are Christians! Are they really Christians? Are they really following the way of Christ, who extended love and hospitality to others? All we have to do is reread the gospels and we will see numerous times that Jesus sat with the sinners, which was an extension of God's love and grace.

The other significant point made by Paul in this letter is we have a part to play in God's redemptive work! I think one of the challenges for the church these days is to be true evangelists. I believe we distort the term evangelism. We have made evangelism into beating people over the head with religion, rather than simply spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us that in Christ, we are children of God....we have been adopted into the family of God. As God has been forgiven, we must forgive others. When we forgive others, we are being evangelists...we are giving them the good news that God's salvation is for all....God doesn't choose certain people to receive this gift...God gives it to all!

Before we can pass this good news on to others, we must receive this gift of salvation from God. Once we understand that this is God's work in our lives and receive this good news, we must share it with others. I can assure you that there are people out there who have been hurt in so many ways. Unfortunately, there are a multitude of people who have been hurt by the church. Maybe you are one of those who have been hurt! However, we have a responsibility as the church....we must share the good news

that in Christ we are forgiven and therefore we can forgive others. Being a Christian is not the easiest thing in the world.....it never said it would be the easiest thing. There are some Christian churches who think that if you are a Christian you shouldn't have any burdens or troubles in life. They make it seem that we should be a superhero of the Christian faith. But that is not what we receive from God in Christ. Paul says that we have redemption through the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.

A man who had been a drunkard on Chicago's Skid Row for many years came to a mission one night. He heard the message, ate the meal, and went to bed. That night ended up being his last evening on earth. He died poverty-stricken and friendless, never to see another day. What he did not know was that he had an inheritance of over 4 million dollars waiting for him in England. The authorities had searched for him but were unable to find him because he had no address. Here was a man who had all the material wealth he could want, but he lived and died in poverty.

In this sense, the man was just like many Christians and non-Christians alike, who live in a spiritual poverty because they are not fully aware of their wealth in Christ.

This is where we, as the church, come into play. We must go out and announce this good news! We must boldly praise the Lord....give God the glory for the great things He hath done! He yielded His life an atonement for sin and opened the Lifegate that all may go in! We have a lot to proclaim....we have a lot to share.....now let's get to work! Amen.