

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“The Might Acts of God: Treasure Lost, Treasure Found”  
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Ephesians 2:1-10

A real buried treasure. It's out there. A small box full of gold nuggets and jewels. I know it's out there north of Santa Fe, New Mexico. I know it's out there because no one has found it yet. Yes, you heard me correctly there is indeed a buried treasure worth a small fortune. It was buried out in the desert by Forrest Fenn, an art collector, who wanted to get people up off the couch and get them hiking and exploring. It was buried out there to once again give people a sense of adventure. And how, might you ask, can you find this real-life treasure? You can find it by looking for clues in a twenty-four line poem that Fenn wrote. He said that no one will find it by accident, but that if they look closely enough at the clues and do some exploring then the treasure will be theirs.

So, how many of you ever dreamed of buried treasure? Maybe it was pirate treasure. Maybe it was a copy of the US Constitution that someone found in an old picture frame...true story. Or maybe the guy who found one of the 47 remaining Tucker 48 automobiles in a barn in Ohio. Well if you have, I have a treat for you this morning because buried right here, in this sanctuary, are treasure boxes, complete with clues, that will lead us to the greatest treasure in the world.

Let's begin with the treasure boxes. They look like this (hold up one of the pew Bibles). Now, before you grab one out of the pew racks, let me tell you why I call these Bibles buried treasure. They were buried treasure because for almost a thousand years, no one was allowed to open them or read them. They were kept locked away so that only authorized persons could discover what was in them. Priests and church scholars were allowed in to them. But people like us, ordinary people, we were not allowed to read them. And not only that, but it was not allowed to translate the Bible into the language of the people. To do so brought death. Yes, you heard me correctly. To translate the Bible was done on the penalty of death, because those who held the treasure chest did not want anyone else to have it. With that in mind, I would like all of you to take out the treasure box and hold it. You may have to share, but I hope everyone will have one that they can look in.

Now. Let's go looking for the clues. Just like Fenn did with his twenty-four-line poem, the scriptures are filled with clues as to the location of the treasure. This morning we will look at three of them and they can all be found in the passage we read this morning, Ephesians 2:1-10. Specifically, we are looking at verses 8-10. The first clue then is the word “grace”; *“For by grace you have been saved.”* Grace is one of those words that lots of people try to define. But if we are to take hold of how it acts as a clue, I want to offer an illustration of grace. This illustration comes from Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son. The son, if you remember, disrespects his father, leaves home, wastes his money and then decides to go home where he expects to be a slave to his father. Instead, when his father sees him, the father runs to

him with arms wide open and embraces him. This is grace. It is God's attitude of arms of love wide open for all people, ready to embrace them in love.

The second clue, is the word "faith": *"You have been saved by grace through faith."* Again, people have argued at length about what faith means. So, again, rather than trying to define it, I want to illustrate it. Faith, is what the son demonstrated when he fell into his father's arms, knowing he did not deserve to be embraced. Remember, the son expected to be treated like a slave. He expected to have to earn his way back into his father's love, if that were even possible. But when the father celebrated the son's return with a party, the son accepted his father's embrace, trusting that this was not a dream, but that his father's love was real. This is faith, that we are willing to fall into the arms of a loving God, even when we have not been the perfect children.

The third and final clue can be found in verse 10, in the words 'Christ Jesus'; *"For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."* There are many ways to think about Jesus. There are lots of theological propositions we could make. But again, let me use an image rather than words. After the father embraces the son, the father calls for the robe and the ring. These are placed on the son and in so doing the son is once again part of the family. He is no longer an outsider or a servant, he is family. This is what Jesus Christ does for us. Christ not only embraces us, but makes us part of God's world-wide inclusive family. Thus, we become part of the church, not through our "goodness" but through the actions of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Those are our clues. What then is the treasure? The treasure is that each of us is loved unconditionally by a gracious, faithful and inclusive God. It is that regardless of who we are or what we have done, God is rushing toward us with open arms, ready to embrace us; ready to make us part of God's one-world family. Some may ask, why is this a treasure? Let me ask a question in response. How many of you have ever had a B.B. King day? What I mean by that comes from the title of one of my favorite songs of his, "Nobody Loves Me but My Mother, and She Could be Jiving Too." In other words, to have a B.B. King day is to have one of those days when the people you trust the most, your closest friends, the people you think you can count on, suddenly act as if you don't exist. Or, like you feel when you have done something you regret and have hurt someone and you wonder if anyone loves you. You wonder if you are worth being loved. It is on those days that this book becomes a treasure, reminding you that there is always someone who loves you; that there is a God who loves you completely and unconditionally and has made you part of a family.

This is the treasure of the Reformation; that we live in the love of God always believing that God is for us. My challenge for you then is this, to ask yourselves, how am I allowing God to embrace me that I might embrace all of those I meet.