

**“..... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ”**

This week a 30 year plan for the future of Adelaide was unveiled. You have to have a plan for a city or you could end up with a mess and all sorts of social problems. Col William Light had a good one, but it never envisaged Adelaide being so big. Everyone needs a plan. You plan your week, your work, your meals and household chores. You have a household budget and some of you a diet or exercise plan. Families plan a holiday and a home, they plan for babies and weddings and retirement, and some of you have a funeral plan. Organizations make business plans and strategic plans. Footy teams have a game plan. In the case of my own team we are not always sure what it is and we don’t have a plan B! Churches are into planning these days – maybe too much sometimes – too much talk and too little action! But if you don’t plan to go somewhere you plan to go nowhere. You need a plan to know where you are going, otherwise life becomes, directionless, chaotic and even meaningless.

Does God have a plan for us? Does he have a plan for this chaotic and broken world? Does he have a plan for your life?

St Paul answers “yes” in the reading we heard today from Ephesians 1.

I don’t know what level of detail is in God’s plan for you or for me. I don’t know how much is fixed. God seems to give us an awful lot of freedom to make our own plans. Some Christians talk as if God planned which seat you would sit in this morning! I think he let you choose. What God’s detailed plan is I don’t know and what level of intervention God makes in our plans is a mystery to me and I am happy to leave it that way. What matters is that whatever happens in life I can see it in relation to God’s master-plan, his bigger picture of things. And that is what we get given to us in Ephesians 1.

God has a plan, a purpose, a will for all of us, and in fact for the whole universe. St Paul was so excited about God’s plan for us that he just kept writing and writing – 200 words without a fullstop!

God has a dream a vision that sees all people gathered as one. No divisions, no “us and them”, no “haves and have nots” no black and white, no battle of the sexes, no Lutherans and others, no labels of any kind- just one people together. Ephesians 1 tells us that God’s plan is “..... **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ**”.

Things don’t always go according to plan. Even God experiences that. When God created us he never planned for wars and violence, divorce and broken relationships, he never envisaged starvation, cancer and death. Things have gone out of whack, out of alignment. Many things about life in the world are now crooked and broken.

In the Old Testament reading today the prophet Amos was given a vision of God standing next to a building with a plumb-line, and it was so crooked it had to be condemned. He was talking about a society where many people were well off, churches were full and government was strong. But if you looked closely the comfortable people didn’t care much about the poor, people were not faithful in relationships, they worshipped but didn’t put their beliefs into practise in daily life, and they did not want to hear the plain truth about their society from God’s prophets. They thought their comfortable lives were a sign of God’ blessing but they were empty of love and compassion and justice.

If God stood next to our society and our church and us today with the plumbline of his commandments and will for the way we were meant to relate and live, both towards him and each other, what would he see? We too would all stand condemned.

Thankfully God has a plan for restoring all things, and he has taken the step necessary to make his dream a reality when sent Christ to cross. God’s plan has to do with Jesus uniting the world by dying to forgive it on the cross. **“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”** God’s plan was not to condemn the world but that Christ had to die to forgive the world and that through Christ everything and everyone would be brought back to God through him. God’s plan is all tied up with Christ. The words “in Christ” or something like them appear 12 times in these verses. God is pulling everything and everyone together in and through Christ. Bringing them to a head, to the head, who is Christ. The words mean that everything adds up, makes sense, has its meaning when we see things in relation to the one who lived the most perfect life, and died a death on behalf of all of us and who is now drawing us back together with God and each other.

And God's plan has included us. We're part of that plan. In baptism you were drawn in. Paul says we have been chosen by God to be part of it. In fact he planned for you to be in on it even before the world was created. God the Father loves you so much he planned for you to be saved before the world began, he sent Christ to die to forgive you and he has given you the Spirit as the guarantee you belong in his plan! In fact the word for guarantee used here is used in modern Greek for an engagement ring – God has given you the Holy Spirit as his engagement ring – the promise of those parts of the plan that are still to come in heaven- our future life together with God.

Wow. How can we understand that? Some people get uptight about this passage and its talk about God planning before the world began and choosing – we call it God's "election". But we are not meant to be unsettled by it wondering if we are chosen or not. The whole point of the passage is to assure you are and have been chosen by God. He has always wanted you to be with him and part of his great vision of one people living harmoniously with him forever.

Our whole lives as Christians are lived conscious of just that!

No matter what happens we don't lose sight of the plan.

"I am wanted, chosen, planned for, died for, redeemed, a child of God! I am holy and blameless in God's sight because of Christ". Now I can look at everything from the perspective of Jesus, who he is, what he has done and what he means for my life and my future. Life, death, the good and the bad all look different from my life "in Christ".

What God's plan is for me day to day I don't know. In fact God doesn't map everything out for us day to day. He gives us the big picture and plan but he gives us a lot of freedom day to day to make our own choices and plans, all he asks is that in everything we live **"for the praise of his glory"**.

His day-by-day plan for you is that you bring him glory – that's about it! Whatever you do, bring glory to him! Is that disappointing? Did you expect more than that? Doesn't God have a plan for my future, whether I'll stick at my job, whether I'll get a promotion, whether I'll be happy, whether I'll have friends, what will happen tomorrow, where I'm going with my life? God's plan is for us to bring him glory. If things go well for you, bring praise to his name. If things go against you, if you fail, don't give up, step back and see the big picture, look at your life from eternity's perspective and continue to live to his glory.

So often we talk about the wonderful way God has worked things out – often meaning things happened just the way we planned them, but what we need to do is to see God at work in every area of our lives, good and bad, pleasing and frustrating, when we're happy and when we're sad, with many friends or lonely, full or unfulfilled – God is there working and wanting us to praise him. Paul was in prison when he wrote these words. He could have said "I was framed" instead says "I was chosen". He could have protested his innocence, instead he says "I am holy and blameless in God's sight. He has no physical dignity but says he possesses every spiritual blessing. "I am his child, I am here to his glory and while I am in here I will praise him – that is the plan. I'm sticking to it!"

We come here to church to be reminded of where we are in God's plan, to see ourselves and each other and the world and the future from his perspective and to know where we stand in relation to God's plan.

As a church it is easy to have own dreams and visions and plans about church and they often centre around us. It's important for us to realise that God is the Master-planner, that he's the Creator, that this is his world, he is the time-keeper and our plans, big or small, succeed or fail depending on God's plan for us. As we make our plans we need to ask "do our plans fit in with God's plan to bring all people to himself through Christ?" , if not we discard those plans. If they do fit in with God's big plan we get on with the job with his help.

God has a plan, for you, for me, for the church, for the universe. That plan is **"..... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ"**. Thank God every day that you and I are part of it.