

## **“Mystery Made Known By Revelation”**

### **Ephesians 1:3-14**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us in Christ  
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,  
just as he chose us in Christ  
before the foundation of the world  
to be holy and blameless before him in love.

He destined us for adoption as his children through Christ,  
according to the good pleasure of his will,  
to the praise of his glorious grace  
that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood,  
the forgiveness of our trespasses,  
according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.

With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us  
the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure  
that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time,  
to gather up all things in him, things  
in heaven and things on earth.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,  
having been destined according to the purpose of him  
who accomplishes all things according to his counsel  
and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope  
on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth,  
the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him,  
were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;  
this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption  
as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

# “Mystery Made Know By Revelation”

Ephesians 3:1-12

January 4, 2026

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

## I.

I'm going to share something with you today but I don't want you to go crazy with it. One of the hardest things to do as a preacher is to know *what* to share, and what *not* to share. Over the past 33 years of my ministry I have come to the conclusion that the best sermons one can deliver are those which are the most authentic. Meaning, sermons that begin at a very real place in one's life and experience, wind their way through the scripture, and end up making a connection to the very real place *you* may be in *your* life and experience. Often times this authenticity takes the form of a humorous retelling of an experience or event in my week or family life. Sometimes this authenticity takes the form of a sad or serious event. On rare occasions this authenticity is derived from a heartfelt frustration or even irritation on my part.

## II.

Yet, no matter the source of a particular sermon's authenticity, each time I write one I must decide how much of my life I should share with all of you. As a rule, I have found sharing more is better than sharing less. There is a great temptation as a preacher to paint oneself as more than you actually are, a better scholar, or a deeper thinker, or a more sensitive pastor. In the end, though, I find that most of you care less about *what* I am, and care more about *who* I am. The same is true of my desire to know *who* you are, not just *what* you are.

At the same time, however, a preacher doesn't want to go *too* far in sharing one's own personal truths. A certain amount of professional distance is appropriate for me, and appreciated by you, I'm sure. As a congregation and a preacher grow together in their relationship, certain kinds of truth telling you never could have envisioned yourself doing, now seem not only appropriate, but even necessary. Today is such an occasion.

### III.

Ready? Here goes.... For sometime now I have had the thought of writing a mystery novel, and for the past several years I have been sketching out the plot. I have a great story line and plot, some rich characters, and a very intriguing mystery to unfold. The story takes place in a small college town, the county seat, somewhere in Northern NY. The main character in the novel is the minister of the local Presbyterian Church. The story begins at a village board meeting, where the Presbyterian minister mumbles under his breath some less than pious words as the board renders its decision to *not* allow a proposed addition to the church for a large gym/fellowship hall, in a 3 to 2 vote. As the minister continues to struggle to get the addition approved, he slowly unravels a dark secret long kept hidden by the descendants of some of the original settlers from this community.

### IV.

As this is happening, a rather cantankerous, old-school type of fella whose family has lived in the town for many generations, is at work replacing a rusted out sewer pipe at the church manse. When the pastor comes home for lunch he checks in with this man down in the old musty manse basement. Turns out the pipe had been running water for some time and in the process had worked away the grout on a part of the old stone foundation. While examining the situation they make the discovery of a secret underground passageway leading from the manse basement and heading off in the direction of the church...right through the site of the proposed gym/fellowship addition the village board will not, for some reason, give permission for them to build. Working together with the two board members who voted for the addition, the plumbing guy, the local historian, and some old-time members of his church, the minister slowly starts to unravel what is going on in this sleepy little town.

### V.

All the while, the ministry of the church continues, and we read about desperate people, kind gestures, the Gospel made real, and the occasional theological aside which helps to frame what life in a church is *really* like, and points the reader toward clues which assist in the revelation of the mystery. It just so happens that the story is set in the same year the church is celebrating the 200th anniversary of its founding.

As part of the preparation for this celebration a very meticulous Elder on the Session keeps bringing the minister historical accounts and events in the 200 year life of the church. One day, the minister is given information about the rebuilding of the church following a fire which broke out one night around the time of the Civil War. And it is this event which provides the “Ah Ha!” moment in the story, as the minister realizes that the old church once stood on the exact spot of the proposed addition, and to which the secret passage is leading.

## **VI.**

Piecing together bits of historical data long buried in the church archives and county historical society, all the while fending off efforts to dissuade him from continuing his search, the minister learns that the Presbyterian Church was once a very active and final stop on the underground railroad which ferried runaway slaves to Canada. It seems, though, that back in those days not everyone in the town was supportive of emancipation, or the secret work of the Presbyterian Church in this regard.

It also seems, that the fire back in the mid 1800's which burned the church to the ground was no accident and, contrary to the common understanding, was not without victims. For it seems that the church, and the escaped slaves hiding in the secret basement of the old church, were betrayed that night by some very powerful people and institutions in the community, and there are some still living in the town who would prefer that this truth never, ever come to light, at any cost.

## **VII.**

Back in my own life, and the real story of our church, I often find myself doing some actual sleuthing about why some people become church-goers, while others do not. Although there are many variables involved, like one's upbringing, habits, inertia, and incorrect assumptions, I think the main reason is this: some people simply love a good mystery while others do not. The life of faith is above all else a decision to live within a mystery. First, there is the mystery of who each person is, really, when you get right down to it. Some people are terrified to admit they really don't know themselves, and are content to live with the answers others have provided about who they are and what they should be. Perhaps for these folks the journey of faith is simply too hard, requiring honest answers to difficult questions.

## VIII.

Then there is the mystery of living in community, or, living *within* the mystery of others. How much do I really want to know about the struggles of others? How much should I share of myself and my own? Sometimes the more you know of a person the more work it is to accept them as the child of God they have been created to be. Sometimes it is simply easier to paint oneself as more than we actually are, sharing only those things which pertain to *what* we are, rather than *who* we are. How far does one go in sharing one's own personal truths?

## IX.

Then there is the mystery of the Christ. In our scripture passage for today from his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul talks about the mystery which was made known by revelation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is both a mystery which has unfolded, but is also unfolding still. Many people assume that the church is the place for the mystery that once was. Many honor, remember, and celebrate this mystery at Easter, Christmas or at times of marriage or death. But, honoring, remember, and celebrating the mystery that is still occurring? Well, that is a very different story indeed. One which requires patience, keen insight, curiosity, the outright enjoyment of living in suspense, and the determination to act based on just a portion of the story.

## X.

Today I would like to invite you to live a life of mystery. You should know that this mystery is one which will only unfold, like reading pages in a novel, through the revelations we find in our daily lives as individual seekers, as members of a living community, and as those who truly believe there is an authentic connection between what *you* experience and what *God* experiences.

For Paul, the purpose of the church, the purpose of who we are in gathering here today, is this: "*To make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known.*" The clues to this mystery are ours to unravel, and they are ours to share. Amen.