



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Adoption As Belonging

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

July 15, 2012

At the beginning of my first year in seminary, we were all asked to identify both our favorite and least favorite scripture passages. My favorite was easy, Micah 6:8. "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God."

The least favorite had several contenders, today's passage from Ephesians among them. Actually, I have some ambivalence toward it, because the passage has parts that I love, but it has that reference, "He has destined us for adoption through Jesus Christ." The reason this idea troubled me was that it seemed to suggest that we were not always of God. I confess that I was influenced by our modern understanding of adoption and the notion that a child is born into one family but becomes a part of another. Using that framework, it seemed that this passage was proclaiming that we are not originally part of God's family but instead only come into God's embrace through the agency of Jesus Christ. Because I have always believed that we are made in the Image of God, it didn't make sense to me that we would need to be adopted, even if it was Jesus who acted as intermediary.

So this week seemed like a perfect opportunity to redeem this passage from my least favored category and investigate how it might be reframed. As usual, the place to start is looking into the concept of adoption and the word in the Bible that actually was used to convey it. Even today, the idea represented in the word "adoption" means different things to different people, based on their own experiences. Sometimes it involves happy stories of childless couples getting a call that there's a baby waiting for them. Other times adoption evokes images of orphans desperately hoping that someone will want them. And then there is the aspect of adoption that deals with children who grapple with the idea that someone gave them away, that they were not wanted. It all depends on your experience. So it takes some work for us to figure out how to interpret this concept of adoption in the letter to the Ephesians.

As I often do, I turned first to my Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, and it did not let me down. Right off the bat, it says that adoption is a metaphor that refers to blessing, initiated by God. By adoption we enter into a new relationship with God. It is an expression of the transforming love which takes us from the "family of disobedience to the family of God." In the same way that the people of Israel are identified by God as the tool that will be used to make God known to the world, so are Christians meant to be instrument of God's mission and love to all who have not yet discovered the joy of belonging.

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In this sense, adoption serves as a metaphor for transformation, and though God is the initiator of this process, we are invited participants. We are not dragged into the family of God kicking and screaming against our will. The invitation is grace, freely given out of God's love for us, and we are invited into this larger and better life with God whether or not we deserve it. But freely given or not, it is incumbent upon us to accept this invitation. We have to cooperate with God's grace. Because we have the choice to respond to this invitation, it makes us actors in the lives of all who are adopted into the family of God, and as such we bear the full responsibility that comes with grace.

Imagine that you are walking down the street and unexpectedly the most beautiful music that you have ever heard spills out through an open passageway. You are aware that this music has the power to move you and possibly even change you. Do you stop what you were doing and listen or do you walk on? Do you allow yourself to be changed, to enter into the harmony, or not? That is the dilemma of grace and the invitation of adoption, which echoes at every corner of our journey with God.

Baptism is the sign of our adoption. This morning, after a couple of false starts, we are finally able to welcome Kellen, the miracle baby into the household of God. Granted that so far he hasn't had much to say about this adoption through baptism, but as the years go by, he will. Some day, Kellen will have the opportunity that our *Confirm not Conform* class had to make their informed choice about how they know themselves and what it means to accept God's invitation to be adopted into the family of God. And he will have all of the resources of Trinity Church to help him understand the difference between the life that is available when one stays centered in love and a life that is driven by fear filled competition.

Perhaps the idea of adoption begins when we embrace God's values and vision. Jesus' life modeled so many of God's values, and he constantly gave us glimpses of God's vision, through his many parables likening the Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps our adoption, through the agency of Jesus Christ, is really just an invitation to adopt his thoughts and behaviors—behaviors oriented around mercy, open-mindedness, justice, and peace. I love Micah 6:8 precisely because it calls us to do justice, be kind, and act humbly.

Humility is a highly underestimated virtue in our culture. I would guess that a fair number of Americans might associate humility with some form of weakness. Weakness itself is not something to be embraced, even though just last week we read in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians about how God's grace is sufficient for us, precisely because it is most powerful in our weakness. But by virtue of our adoption into the family of God, we gain the wisdom, insight, and understanding necessary to embrace our weakness, and walk humbly. Walking humbly, in our weakness, allows us to see things around us that we otherwise would not. It allows us to consider possibilities that we otherwise reject out of hand. It forces us to move away from our predilections to protect and defend ourselves, in favor of a more open minded

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way of being and an orientation toward the other that brings us into balance with who we really are.

Little Kellen's life began too early and it has taken many, many people to bring him to this day. Along with the nurses and doctors and technicians, Kellen was surrounded with prayer by this congregation and others. Today begins his journey of being and learning within the Body of Christ. Our new little brother will join us in the work God gives us to do. That's even worth an Alleluia!

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