

July 15, 2012/Season after Pentecost/David L. Edwards

Adoptive Love: A Matter of Choice

Ephesians 1:3-6[7-14]

God destined us for adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of God's will....

Paul was deeply convinced, out of his personal experience, that God was for all people, regardless of their status or condition in life. He wanted to say to the Christians at Ephesus that in Jesus, they had been brought home to God by God's own love, which is always reaching out, bringing in, and bringing together. Though they were Gentiles, that is, non-Jews, they had been made one with the whole people of God. The love of God is without boundaries.

In the first two sentences of our reading for today, Paul offers three important insights into Jesus as the embodiment and expression of God's love. First, God ***has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places***. God's love for us and all people holds nothing back, lavishes on us every possible blessing. The blessing of God incessantly pours out on us and into us from every sacred corner and crevice of the cosmos. Each day and each moment, we have everything we need to know ourselves as blessed and to live our lives as a blessing.

Not only that, God has ***chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love***. In Jesus we experience God's having chosen us from the beginning so that we might live the way we were created to live. God has not only created life a blessing but also given our lives the nature of **chosenness and call**. Being chosen and called means that our living can be an expression of the love with which we have been loved, the love that is at the heart of the universe. Being ***holy and blameless*** does not mean obsessing over our own purity or moral perfection, which is only another kind of self-centeredness. God's love liberates us from all

self-preoccupation so that we love with the out-looking, out-flowing, out-reaching love of God.

Then Paul writes: ***God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of God's glorious grace that God freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*** Paul uses the image of adoption to get closer to the profound nature of God's love for us.

Thirty-three years ago, in Lexington, Kentucky, Kaye and I were lying in bed one February night, too excited to sleep. On the dresser sat a toy bear with a wind-up music box inside, which we kept playing over and over. We had bought the bear to take with us to Elizabethtown, Kentucky, the next morning when we would meet the fourteen month-old boy who would become our son. Kaye was also seven months pregnant with our daughter Shelley.

We had decided to adopt a child regardless of whether or not we would be able to have a birth child. So the meaning of adoptive love has always been of great interest to me. My spiritual ears perk up every time I read Paul's words about God's love "adopting" us. ***God destined us for adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of God's will.*** I do not really like that translation so much. It has led to a lot of heady and burdensome doctrines, like "predestination," the idea that God has planned everything out, and we just go through the motions like robots. That is not what Paul is saying. A better rendering would be, ***God decided beforehand, early on, to adopt us through Jesus Christ.***

God's love has the nature of intention, of choosing to love. The love that is at the heart of the cosmos, the love that called into being all that is--that love is not only an expression of divine affection, but also of a divine will to love. Why? Because it gives God pleasure to love in this way! Isn't that incredible! The Power that courses through the creation not only brought us into being, gave us birth, but also continues to reach out to us, to choose us. And all because it makes God happy to do so!

No wonder Paul uses the image of adoption as he tries to describe the

meaning of Jesus. We are all God's children simply by being human beings and part of God's creation. We are all God's birth children, you might say. However, Paul wants to say more about the meaning of Jesus. In him we know a love that continues to come to us, to reach out to us when we lose our way. Paul is a realist. He knows that we human beings, though born the children of God, drift into forgetfulness and wander into ways of living that harm others, ourselves, and the creation of which we are a part. Does that mean we are no longer God's children? Does that mean God disinherits us, gives up on us? No, says Paul. The nature of God's love is to continue to decide for us, to find ways of re-awakening us, of restoring the relationship. God continually chooses to love. So, Paul talks about God's adoptive love.

We brought Kent home to be our son, and Shelley was born two months later. We began to learn over and over that the love that matters most is more of a choice than a feeling. The cute little children bring challenges, and the challenges become more challenging as they grow older, and as we stumble over our deficiencies as parents! I have thought many times that the adoptive love we had for Kent by choosing him as our son is exactly the same love we had to have for Shelley, our birth child. When it is no longer "fun," when we disappoint or hurt each other, when expectations are not fulfilled, when we go through the clashes and clangings of living together as human beings, the important thing is choosing to love when "feelings" of love waiver and change. Most of the time, those feelings have to do with our image of what we wanted another person to be or how we expected they should please us in some way. When that doesn't happen, the feelings that had to do with our own wants and needs get disappointed. We think we are no longer "in love." Thank God we aren't! What we as a culture call love is something else--ego-centeredness, co-dependency, whatever. When we come to the point of choosing to love this other person, real love begins to emerge. When we face the challenge of renewing and deepening our commitment to a mission that has become difficult, or to the community when we get disillusioned, then we are at the threshold of loving with the love of God. It is love that chooses to nurture and

sustain the relationship. It is love that nourishes our fuller, truer personhood. It is love that can forgive, understand, reconcile, and empower. The love with which we have been loved, which we know in Jesus, becomes our way of life. And we choose it again and again.

As we grow more and more in this kind of love, we begin to experience the joy of loving. We begin to touch a whole new motivation for loving—because it gives us pleasure to love! We leave behind us the sorts of loving that always expect something in return, that want to control others, make them the way we think they should be. Such love is always disappointed, always frustrated. Yet, the love of which Paul speaks is the highest and deepest love of which we are capable. We begin to choose to love because it gives us pleasure, because of the joy of loving. That is the nature of God's own love.

Common to Covenant and Community Membership is this discipline: *Endeavor to be a channel of God's love and forgiveness in every relationship.* How in the world can we ever be able to do that! I think that this business of adoptive love, the love of God that we know and experience in Jesus, can help us. It is certainly about our outward journey, the ways we relate to each other, other people, and the world around us. However, as with everything else, it begins with and is rooted in our inward journey. The daily time we take for our inward journey enables us to touch God's having given us every blessing from every corner of the universe, and God's having chosen and called us in Jesus to be the people God created us to be, to live the life of love. And we come to see and know more clearly God's love that chooses us again and again, a love that never gives up on us. Knowing and being a channel of that love means two things in our inward journey work. We work with the things in us that block that love and way of loving—the ways we love out of our own expectations, demands, and needs. As we perceive, understand, and let go of those impediments to love, we not only clear the way for God's love to flow through us but also we are liberated from a lot of misery and unhappiness! As we do this kind of inward journey work, we will also begin to touch and grow in that more profound motivation for loving--because it gives us joy. We will be able to

love with the same love that gives God pleasure.