

Adopted through Christ

Sunday School Lesson

Ephesians 1:3-14

November 3, 2024

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis tells us that God created two humans, a male and a female. God did not create them just to see what they would do – God created them to be in relationship, to each other and to God. Adam and Eve broke that relationship. They had to leave the garden but God kept watch and when one son killed another, God did not punish him by taking his life but by marking him so that no one would kill him.

Humanity became so violent and evil that God decided it was time to start over and God sent the rains but spared one family, the family of Noah. Eventually, God made a covenant with one of Noah's descendants, Abraham. Through this family and through Abraham's descendants, God would redeem the world. Abraham's descendants made a great nation but they failed as well to maintain a loyal relationship to God. So God sent his son, Jesus. Jesus will not fail. Jesus did not fail.

Before Jesus, it was not certain that Gentiles would have access to God's promises. Those promises seemed to only be for the Hebrews even though Jesus' family tree contained several Gentile women. Jesus' disciples were all Jewish but Jesus' ministry did extend beyond the limits of Judaism. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit touched all lives, both Jew and Gentile. The Book of Acts continues to show us that through Christ, all are welcomed into God's Kingdom.

Our passage for today begins with the blessing that is a part of every Seder prayer, *Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.*

Let us pray

O Holy God and Creator of the Universe, thank you for being present with us this week. Open our hearts to hear your word so we may be faithful disciples who are known by our love for one another and for our love of our neighbors. Amen.

Our Purpose Statement: **To explore the concept of adoption by God through Christ.**

Adoption is the process whereby a person assumes the parenting of another, usually a child, from that person's biological or legal parent or parents. Legal adoptions permanently transfer all rights and responsibilities from the biological parents to the adoptive parents. An adoptive child is fully incorporated into a new family. Unlike guardianship or other systems designed for the care of the young, adoption is intended to effect a permanent change in status and as such requires societal recognition, either through legal or religious sanction.

When my children were young, most of their closest friends were adopted but you would only know that by knowing their story. The bonds between the parents and their adoptive children was as strong as the bonds between my children and their biological parents. Because those adoptive parents were so welcoming, my own children always felt like a part of the family when they went to their homes to play. There seemed to be an extra layer of hospitality and acceptance. I don't know if I could have identified it then as I see it now in hindsight.

The Apostle Paul was not married and had no children of his own but he was passionate regarding the extension of salvation to the Gentiles. Following his Damascus experience, Paul spent at least three years rereading the Hebrew scripture so he could understand it through the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He came to understand John's words:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. John 3:16-17

Paul's ministry was primarily to the Gentiles in Asia Minor. He was met with considerable criticism from the church in Jerusalem who did not understand things the same way. (We should note that change is always very difficult, especially for those who were set apart by their identity for so long.) The Paul we know was a dramatic change from the Saul who persecuted followers of Jesus. For those of us who have chosen to follow Jesus, we should ask ourselves what has changed in our hearts as a result of following Jesus? Our Lesson gives us several questions to consider.

What is a disciple?

What is the purpose of a disciple?

How is a disciple made?

Who makes a disciple: us or God?

How do you know when you have led someone to discipleship?

In an adoptive family, those who are adopted continue the family traditions and heritage. Accepting Jesus as Lord is the first step of a lifelong process. Being a disciple is a continuing journey throughout our lives. Not everyone who joins a church or attends a church will become a disciple. They may attend but remain passive and discipleship is never passive. We are called to become more like Christ and that just does not happen overnight. Sometimes it happens in spurts and sometimes it is a long marathon. We do this together as part of a church family. In the United Methodist Church, that family is larger than just our church – we are connected to a worldwide body that helps us to learn and grow.

How does your life reflect being a disciple of Jesus Christ?

O Holy God, transform our lives as we follow you. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and most of all, hearts that do not judge. Amen.