

## Adopted!

July 12, 2009

Topic: Baptism

Scriptures-----Matthew 3: , Galatians 4: 1-7

I grew up as one of five children. We were a big, noisy group, close together in age. My parents were amazing, loving, and patient. We had great times together, travelling around the country, going camping and hiking, picnicking, swimming at the beach, and playing together.

Now, you might think that 5 kids would be plenty, but there were at least two times in our life together that we talked seriously about adopting another child. We talked about how another person would fit into our family, how we would treat them the same as we treated each other, how we would share everything with them, take them everywhere we went, make room at the table for them,

Love them the same as we loved each other.

We never did follow through with adopting, but we were ready to. Maybe my parents really couldn't figure out how to physically put another person in our house or maybe they looked at their finances and just couldn't stretch the budget any further.

I don't really know why it never happened. It certainly wasn't because there wasn't enough love to go around! It wasn't because we kids were against it.

We had already seen how adding more people to a family worked.

When I was seven years old we moved next door to a man named Mac, who was divorced and had three kids. My sister Janet and I became best friends with the girls, Karen and Sue.

When Mac remarried a few years later, his new wife Claire brought two more daughters into that house. That family became one, with everyone loved the same without consideration of whether they were child or stepchild. And my sister and I soon loved the new sisters, Carol and Marsha, as much as we loved Karen and Sue, who had lived there all along.

Stepdad, stepmom, stepchild, had no place in the vocabulary of that family. Everyone was loved the same, everyone belonged, everyone was equally a part of that family.

There was no formal, legal adoption involved, but both parents effectively adopted the other's children. And the children returned the feeling.

Adopted. It doesn't mean you are a second-class family member. It means you are loved enough to become fully a part of that family.

Fully loved, fully accepted, and fully responsible for being a part of the family.

Some of us are not so fortunate. Some of us do not feel fully loved. In fact, many of us struggle to believe that we are loved. We can't accept that we are, even when it's true. I don't know why that is. Something in our character that thinks we are too bad or not good enough or just not important enough to be loved. Maybe we're not pretty enough or thin enough or smart enough or whatever enough.

Whatever the reason, we believe, some of us, that we are just not worthy of love.

We spend our lives longing for love, chasing after it, feeling lonely and unwanted, even when there are people around us who really do love us.

We just can't see it, can't accept it, don't believe it in our heart of hearts.

We think we have to be better people, or do something special, or accomplish some goal or other----then we will be happy, we will be perfect, we will be loved.

In effect, we spend our lives waiting to be adopted and finally be accepted and loved.

Last week I talked about the sacrament of Holy Communion and how it helps us to feel connected to God and to all other people.

Those connections, those relationships, are of ultimate importance, and so we partake of communion as often as possible.

Today I want to talk about the importance of baptism in our relationship to God.

In the United Methodist Church we baptize anyone who desires it, including infants when their parents request it on their behalf. Some denominations wait to baptize until a person can make their own decision and take the vows for themselves, but we don't.

We consider baptism to be a sign of what God has done, not anything that we have to do first. It's not our decision or our action, but a public acknowledgement of what God has already done and is doing for us.

Our lives are filled with what God does for us. What we do in response to what God has done is important, yes! Very important! And that is where confirmation comes in. It is our response to what God did for us beginning on the day we were born!

And what God did for us, before we even asked, before we even understood that we needed it, is to give us grace.

Before we even asked, before we even knew what it was that we needed, God knew. And God offered it to us. We did nothing to deserve it. We didn't even have to ask. All we have to do is accept it.

So in baptism, we acknowledge that God has already offered us grace. The person being baptized, or the parents of the baby being baptized, are there to publicly accept that grace, to make a statement of faith that God has already extended grace and love.

We don't have to do anything to earn that grace and love. We don't have to be a certain age or have a certain understanding. God has already given it to us.

And in baptism, just as in the baptism of Jesus, God pronounces publicly that we are the beloved children of God, in whom he is well pleased. We haven't done anything to earn that love or the fact that he is well pleased. Just the fact that we are his creation is enough.

In our reading from the Gospel of Matthew today, Jesus told John the Baptist that he was being baptized “to fulfill all righteousness.”

Now, righteousness is kind of a hard word to define. It’s used in different ways in different places in the Bible. But here in Matthew it’s used to mean “in accordance with God’s will.”

So it was God’s will for Jesus to be baptized, but the baptism was to “fulfill all righteousness.” So ALL of God’s will was fulfilled in the baptism of Jesus! Let’s think about what that means---

Jesus’ ministry began after his baptism. His ministry taught us many things, what God is like, how we should live, how we should pray, how we should love God and love each other. Jesus told us that he came to bring us abundant life, eternal life.

Baptism signifies the beginning of the abundant life that Jesus came to bring us. Abundant life as children of God.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, we read that we are adopted as children of God. We are not begotten children. Only Jesus is God's begotten child. We are adopted.

Paul tells us that in that adoption, we are made heirs with Christ----  
Heirs of life eternal, heirs of the eternal God.

We don't have a lesser status. We are not slaves or servants or some kind of second class citizens. Along with Christ, we are heirs of the Kingdom of God!!

We are beloved children of God, a status we did not earn, a relationship we didn't have to do anything to achieve. God has adopted us and so we cannot be dismissed as servants can or sold off as slaves can. There is NOTHING we can do to undo our adoption!

Baptism is once and for all. We don't need to repeat it just like a legal adoption today cannot be undone and need to be redone.

Now, I am not saying that baptism has nothing to do with repentance and forgiveness. It has everything to do with them! But being baptized does not come after the repentance and does not result in forgiveness.

Baptism does cleanse us from our sin in a similar way to children who want to be good and not disappoint the parents who love them very much. When we know we are loved, we have more strength, more resources, more motivation to resist the temptation to act out, to misbehave, to sin.

There is a connection between baptism and repentance and forgiveness, then.

Especially when we understand what our baptism means-----that God loves us enough to adopt us as his beloved children.

That love can change everything for us, when we really truly accept it.

When we come to grips with it, when we come face to face with God's amazing grace.

Who can stand in the face of that grace, that love? Who can keep on with their lives of stubborn independence, stubborn rejection, stubborn sinfulness?

Once we accept that grace is a gift from God, unearned, unconditional, then **WE ARE CHANGED!**

We are made new. We become capable of loving others in a new way.

Once we are adopted into the family of God, we become more like our brother, Jesus Christ. Then we are more able to learn from Christ, to follow Christ.

Baptism is a sacrament. Sacraments signify an action of God. Holy Communion signifies God's saving, loving, forgiving action in Christ, an action that connects us both to God and to each other. In communion, we demonstrate our acceptance of God's love by accepting the bread and the juice and making them a part of ourselves, repenting of our sin and remembering that God loves us.

Baptism signifies that we are created by God to be part of God's family, adopted by grace and made to be heirs of God's Kingdom alongside our brother Christ. In baptism we demonstrate our acceptance of God's grace by getting a little wet, to wash away the dirt of the world and revealing the people that we were created to be.

To help us to become who God created us to be, we ask the Holy Spirit to come into us. The Holy Spirit gives us strength and helps us to know the truth of God's unconditional love for us.

When we are baptized, the pastor always asks for our name. When a child is adopted, sometimes the new parents give the child a new name, and always the last name changes. A new name for a new life in Christ.

Sometimes, like I talked to the kids about, God has a different name for us than the one the world knows us by.

The world sees us one way. God sees us another, a truer way. The world puts its own perceptions, its own expectations, its own problems, on us, and calls us by whatever name it wants.

What name does God call you? When you were baptized, God called you, saying "This is my beloved child," followed by a name. It's the name you will have in the Kingdom of God. Maybe it sounds the same as the name people call you now. But maybe not.

I had the children choose a special stone to help them remember their God-given name. I want you to do the same thing on the way out today. Choose a stone to keep with you or to keep in a

special place that will remind you of how special you are to God,  
how much God loves you.

Choose one that will always remind you that you are a beloved  
child of God, inheriting the Kingdom of God with Christ, adopted as  
a full member of God's family.

Remember your baptism, and be thankful.

Amen.