

**- Saint John's Pulpit (July 11, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost)
- "Grace of Adoption" Ephesians 1:3-14**

³ 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, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ 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, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ 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; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

One more chance?

I love to see pets from several pet adoption websites such as humane society websites county by county, Petfinder.com, and local newspapers. My favorite pet is a dog, usually, I used to spend time seeing dogs. However, here is another reason to see dogs. It is to read stories about each of the dogs.

When you check some websites about adopting pets, you would be surprised to see that each of them has her own stories. No fun, no joy. Abandoned, abused, or missed are their middle names. It looks like they want their permanent home, friends, and family. From my observation, some dogs look sad/stressed because of their trauma, or others look energetic. No matter how they look forward to seeing the moment of their adoption.

Still, I remember when I chat with Brian Heath one day about his adoption experience which inspired me a lot. He told me that every day he is so busy learning from his pets adopted recently. What makes this story more meaningful is that he intentionally adopted old dogs without vision and hearing! From hopeless to hopeful! From abandoned to adored!

If God would have His own computer (I don't think He needs it), maybe God is checking each of us through His 'adoption (salvation)' website. Like pets on some websites, we also have our own stories too. We have scars, trauma, and stories we do not want to open. However, the only thing we should know is that God wants us to live a new life in His Grace. This is what the text today presents now!

Grace of Adoption

If you would get one more chance to live your life, how would you like to live your new life? Indeed, the theme 'rebirth' had been one of the important ideas in religions. In Buddhism, we can see it from their '*samsara and rebirth*'. Depending on how you did good or bad in this world, you would be born as a noble one or not. Simply speaking, it is like your credit card rewards!

By contrast, rebirth in the Christian faith shows is unique and special. It is not conditional, but unconditional.

⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:5-6 NRSV

To explain Christian rebirth, Apostle Paul used the term 'adoption' from the verses above. This requires our understanding '*patria potestas*' in Roman society, which means father's authority in his family.

In Roman culture, fathers had the authority to manage each of their families. With father's word or order, his children's life was decided. Fathers could make their kids slaves and even kill them.

With this strange and somewhat horrible authority in our eyes today, 'adoption' had a very special meaning at that time. By such a strong patriarchal authority, if one would be adopted, that person would be destined to live under his/her father's great authority. Fathers do not care what their adopted ones did in the past. Upon their adoption, the adopted ones could live a totally new life! Had a huge debt or unpaid mortgage before? No worries! All would be cleared out perfectly at the moment of adoption!

In ancient Rome and even in Paul's days, this understanding of 'adoption' was popular. Thus, Apostle Paul coined this popular concept to help people catch the meaning of rebirth in God. This is not your credit card reward depending on how much you use. This means that a VVIP card would be given to you under your father's name. Of course, no limit! So, the only thing we need to do is praising the Lord for His Grace (verse 6)!

After being adopted...

Although this grace of adoption is free to all, here is one responsibility for all those who experience God's adoption. It is in Ephesians 1:4.

⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. Ephesians 1:4 NRSV

Please look at this- "be holy and blameless before him in love." The word 'holy' is '*hagios*' in Greek. This Greek word '*hagios*' has two meanings: be different and be separated. Sabbath Day is *hagios* because it is different from weekdays. The animals to be offered are *hagios* because they are different from other animals. Likewise, being holy means being different and being separated from other uses.

All adopted ones by God are asked to be holy, which means they need to live a different life. However, being holy requires our careful attention and approach when we live with others. Being holy does not mean you're speaking out "I am holy, or I am different from you!" It is not religious superiority. It is not judging others because they do not meet your

expectation. It means to be harmonious with others, but have a strong standard to follow God's words inwardly.

We know that Jesus is the holy one. But he did not show any superiority when he lived with others. Rather, he ate with tax collectors, beggars, and prostitutes. Jesus lived a holy life without hurting others because of his holy life. That was the reason why his holiness could not be a dogma, but bring life to others!

What about being blameless? In Greek word, blameless is '*amomos*.' Usually this word is used for all animals offered to God. Simply speaking, being blameless should meet God, not us! Those adopted ones by God need to meet God, not people. Also, this means our ongoing effort to become blameless day by day. Apostle Paul presents this idea in Galatians 1:10 clearly:

10 Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10 NRSV

We don't have to brag out "I am pleasing God!" Rather, we need to live our life to meet God, because He is our Lord. In addition to this, there is one more thing requiring our careful attention to be holy and blameless. How could we be holy and blameless gracefully? Apostle Paul says that we do this in love!

4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. Ephesians 1:4 NRSV

In love! Isn't it interesting to see the word 'love' is the last word to complete this verse? For all United Methodists, I believe that the word 'love' can give us a good idea to deal with all issues we've struggled with for years. Even for all matters in our family, community, and churches!

The point is this. The best way to treasure God's grace of adoption is to practice His love for others as our Father adopted us unconditionally. When we practice this, we all live a new life in Christ!