

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

July 14, 2024, The 8th Sunday After Pentecost, The 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Psalm 24 (The Message Translation) Ephesians 1:3-14 (The Message Translation)

THE ADOPTION AGENCY

I am pleased to welcome you to God's Adoption Agency this morning. Children of God, I am glad you decided to show up this morning in person, here in one of the satellite offices of the Adoption Agency. For those of you at home, rest assured that God's Agency is world-wide and comes by satellite, YouTube and Facebook, and most importantly by the Holy Spirit into each home and life.

What we've found at God's Adoption Agency is that it is good, from time to time, to review with our adoptees the terms of their adoption in Christ. We like to use the terms of adoption found in Ephesians, although it really takes all the words of the Bible for you to understand your family story.

The best part of your adoption is that it happened long before you born. In fact, did you know that God decided to adopt each one of you into the family of God before there were even people on the earth?

Let that sink in for a minute.

Before you were even imagined by your parents, or their parents imagined them, and so on and so on, back into the dusty halls of history, until you get to the beginning of Genesis 1 when the earth was a formless void and darkness hovered over the face of the deep, and the Holy Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters, God already had a place of love for you, each one of you individually, in the heart of God.

We, at the Adoption Agency, love the way that Paul said it to the Ephesians nearly 2000 years ago. We've had to translate out of the Greek into hundreds of world languages, and even in your English we've translated it again and again as the years have gone by, so you can really rejoice in this amazing news. Listen to these words Paul wrote in his letter:

*"Long before God laid down earth's foundations, God had us in mind,
had settled on us as the focus of God's love,
to be made whole and holy by love.*

Long, long ago God decided to adopt us into God's family through Jesus Christ.

What pleasure God took in planning this! (Ephesians 1: 4-6, The Message Translation)

God's beloved children, can you even imagine this? Before creation, you were in God's heart; you, sitting in this sanctuary, you sitting on the couch or your recliner at home.

YOU were in God's heart waiting to be adopted by God's unending love.

And Paul assures us: "What pleasure God took in planning this!"

Now, we at the Agency get tired of art, books, memes and preaching that shows God as the grumpy or humorless, angry old man or woman with lightning bolts coming out from clenched fists. We give you permission to rip up those pictures and pages, and please don't forward those memes anymore. They aren't true. (Well don't rip them out of library books, some of them are considered "fine" art and we don't want you to get into trouble, just close the books and walk away.

They aren't true images of God, because God smiles on you. God's love was focused on you from the very beginning of the beginning. So, we encourage you the next time you see a picture of that raging storming, grumpy old God to tell whomever you are with, "Well that isn't God at all. God

wants us to be whole and holy. God dreamed each of us in love from before the beginning of time!"

The Agency thanks you advance for your speaking this truth. Our hope is that in time the dusty old images from angry people and dispirited preachers will go the way of all dust, and blow away on cleansing winds.

The Agency has a favorite picture we like to use to help you spend time with the Love that is for you. You'll find it on the back of your bulletin and the back of the yellow insert. If you'd like to see it in color you can find it out on the table outside the Sanctuary, or during the week on your pastor's wall where it usually resides. This favorite picture is an icon written by Andrei Rublev back in the early 1400's. Icons are windows that let you look into them to see truths about God, the Trinity, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and so many parts of God's love found in Scripture. One of our wise teachers from the Agency once told a woman that God loved her so much that she was like the chalice, the cup from communion, in this picture. And all the Trinity did all day was gaze on her with love.

Since we heard that explanation years ago, we have included this icon in our Agency's brochures and certificates, and we have told this story to everyone to whom we speak.

So, I encourage you right now to look at this picture and imagine that you are the chalice.

All the Trinity is doing right now is gazing on you with love,

holding onto you in love,

the love that God has had for you from the beginning of time.

The Agency hopes that you will take this copy of Rublev's "The Trinity" home with you today.

Whenever you need to be reminded of who you are as a child of God, please take time again with this icon. Let that Love of our Three in One God saturate your being, beloved Children of God!

Now, let's get down to the nuts and bolts of this talk. This is usually the time in our presentation that we begin to hear rumblings from the audience, and finally someone is brave enough to ask the question, "yes, but what does this cost us, what does this whole and holy love cost us?" Or someone will ask: "What is the bottom line for this adoption as a child of God?" "What am I expected to do before I can get this adoption?"

Let me tell you the truth, because of Jesus Christ, and his life, death and resurrection to new life, this gift of love, this adoption as a child of God, costs you nothing, you can't pay for it; Jesus already did.

You can't earn it this love

you can't be good enough to earn it,

you can't do a list of good things to earn it,

you can't be strong enough, or smart enough, and you don't have to be a certain age to be adopted, you are born adopted by God, you are a child of God from your first breath!

You can't accomplish a list of good things first, not even the 10 Commandments.

You might not believe me, but being good enough has not worked for anyone, Not Moses, Miriam or Aaron, not King David, or Esther or Ruth;

Not the disciples Peter, James or John, or Mary or Martha, or Mary the mother of Jesus, or Mary Magdalene

Not your parent, beloved grandparent, your best friend, your favorite pastor or Sunday School teacher, not the holiest person you know.

No one, absolutely no one, can do anything to earn this love from God.

Beloved children of God, your adoption is a gift, freely given by God.
 Your adoption as a child of God is based on who God is,
 not on who you are, or who your parents were,
 or what's happened to you, or is going to happen to you,
 or what you've ever done, or not done.

It is a free gift for you, given in love. God chose you before you even tried to choose God!

Paul puts it so well:

Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! God thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans God took such delight in making. God set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in Christ, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth. It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for.
 (Ephesians 1: 7-11, selected, The Message Translation)

This Good News is why the Adoption Agency likes to send a representative like me every once and while to remind all of you adopted Children of God of who you are. Because we know that this world isn't an easy place to live in at times. There is a lot going on around the world, and around your families, and around your own life, so we like to drop in and bring you another adoption certificate to remind you of what is true.

And who says it better than Paul: *"Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, God had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose God is working out in everything and everyone. It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This down payment from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.* (Ephesians 1: 11-14, selected, The Message Translation)

Family of faith the cross is empty, the tomb is empty and you have been given the gift of adoption into the love of God, a gift from God given in love, and now you get to live as Children of God. You get to live praising and glorious lives.

You don't need to be scared that you aren't doing it right.

You don't need to worry that you aren't good enough.

You don't need to worry about the past, or the future.

You get to explore the joyous life of faith because you are loved, always loved!

Enter it with baby steps, the Adoption Agency wants to remind you that we are always going to be children of God, not adults of God, learning, always learning the life of faith.

So let us toddle along with joy, getting back up when we fall down, knowing that our loving Parent is always there to catch us.

The Adoption Agency reminds you to revel and celebrate in this moment, grab ahold of your yellow Adoption Certificate and believe that those words are for you:

"You have always been a Child of God chosen before creation began!

You are adopted in the Name and long-range plans of Jesus Christ your Savior.

You are signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit.

Child of God, you get everything God has planned for you,

A PRAISING and GLORIOUS LIFE!

The Adoption Agency hopes you will take your Certificate, and Rublev's Icon, home with you today, and put it in a place where it can remind you of who you really are.

You are loved by the Creator of the Universe, loved beyond measure, always and forever.

To the Glory of the God who chose us before time,

With thanksgiving to our Savior Jesus who has given us abundant Life,

And with all adoration to the Holy Spirit who is nestled in our hearts,

May all praise and glory echo from our spirits and lives always!

Alleluia, Amen!