

Adopted=Chosen=Beloved

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at the Celtic Eucharist, St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, October 13, 2016

In the name of the God who chooses us, gathers us, and reveals the mystery of divine will to us. Amen.

A Sunday school teacher gave each child in the room a folded slip of paper with a word written on it, terms like *loved, redeemed, forgiven, valued, precious*. One child received the word *adopted* and sulked. ¹The teacher had meant the term within a Scriptural context, but the child didn't see it this way. He only went with the understanding most familiar to us.

Adopted tends to be an uncomfortable distinction in our society. For one thing, we associate adopted persons with neglect or abandonment by biological parents. We also tend to see adopted children as different because they exist outside the traditional definition of family: blood kin. However, love, not blood, makes a family. Whether biological or adoptive parents, close friends, teachers, or anyone who has nurtured us in some way, these individuals have shown us by their examples how to love, how to belong.

God also does the same.

The word “adopt” comes from the Latin *adoptare*, which means “to choose.” That Sunday school teacher, in using *adopted* as one of her terms, meant that we are chosen. According to this evening's first lesson from Ephesians 1: 1-10, God chooses us as God's own, to be God's beloved, to dwell in love with each other and with God, to be adopted as God's children through Jesus. We are as beloved as the Beloved. This means that God wants to be in close relationship with us, as family. And God takes “good pleasure” in this. Let that sink in a moment. We are loved. We are included. We are delighted in. We are chosen. Our response, we are told later in verse 12, is to live for the praise of God's glory in Christ.

But we often choose not to do this. A look at what's going on in our own country—racial injustice, rape culture, misogyny and sexism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, gun violence—shows we're not really choosing to see and love others as brothers and sisters. And if we're not choosing to do that, then we're not choosing to be in relationship with God or to live as Jesus did. We're not following his example. We're not living as included, delighted in, or chosen. No wonder Jesus warns in tonight's Gospel, “Woe to you!” (Luke 11: 47-54). Yes, he is speaking directly to a people's hypocrisy—specifically, building monuments to remember the old prophets who were killed by their ancestors—but I also think Jesus is speaking to something deeper, that we pay a price in persecuting each other. We end up persecuting ourselves.

So the next time we're about to say something hurtful, the next time we fear someone who appears different, let's stop for a moment. Let's adopt a policy to adapt. Let's choose to change, living as though God's love, inclusion, and delight can be found in each person we

meet. We may find joy instead of woe. We may find ourselves. And God will be pleased. God will even call us beloved.

ⁱ Bonner, Esther. "Adopted." *The Upper Room*. September-October 2016, 82 (4): p. 7.