

## “Chosen for Adoption”

Ephesians 1:1-14 and Mark 6:14-29

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### Ephesians 1:1-14

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

### Mark 6:14-29

<sup>14</sup>King Herod heard of it, for Jesus’ name had become known. Some were saying, “John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.” <sup>15</sup>But others said, “It is Elijah.” And others said, “It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.” <sup>16</sup>But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” <sup>17</sup>For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because Herod had married her. <sup>18</sup>For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” <sup>19</sup>And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, <sup>20</sup>for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. <sup>21</sup>But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. <sup>22</sup>When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.” <sup>23</sup>And he solemnly swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” <sup>24</sup>She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.” <sup>25</sup>Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” <sup>26</sup>The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. <sup>27</sup>Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring

John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, <sup>28</sup>brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. <sup>29</sup>When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Prayer.

We live in a dog-eat-dog, type A driven, polarized world.

1. Beheadings: Christians should not be startled or surprised when we see on the evening news video, taken from a Jihadist web page, that graphically depicts the beheading of an American or western hostage in the captivity of Iraqi insurrectionist. Sick? Yes. Surprised? No.
  - a. We only need to turn to our own Gospel, which literally means "good news" (now isn't that ironic?) to discover that beheadings have been taking place for a long, long time.
  - b. Violence and terror are perhaps the most effective works of the evil one, and have become so accepted by society that we take them with a shrug and a change of the channel.
2. Israel and Palestine: Every bone in my body wants to make additional pilgrimages to the Holy Lands. Each time I go, I want to take a hundred church members, so that others may experience the joy and depth of faith that goes hand in hand with walking where Jesus walked. I want it to be shared by everyone I know. My one and only trip in 1986 only served to wet my spiritual appetite.
  - a. And now we watch the effect of Hezbollah being elected as the democratic government of Palestine. We watch rockets being fired into Israel, and Israeli tanks and jets bombing to smithereens the mud huts of Palestinians. Families, women, and children are being evaporated as if they never existed, and the world complains about the rising cost of crude oil.
  - b. I think to myself, when will the time come that I can return? But even I, don't bother to lift a hand to change the situation.
3. Streets of Rochester: We live in the suburbs, the safe, insulated neighborhoods where all the good school districts exist. It is a smug, thin smile on our face as we watch the evening news; to observe the gang bangers, rapsters, and rapists tear apart ethnic, city neighborhoods and schools.
  - a. If we aren't saying "thank God we don't live there" we are saying "oh, Lord, how are we going to get out of here?"
  - b. Fact is, this is one community, with many parts, and where there is suffering in any part, all parts suffer.
  - c. Yet, I don't see any suburban churches doing anything to build missional bridges to intercity churches or neighborhoods. Instead, the prevailing attitude is, "lock the door, dear. Turn on the air conditioning and let's not go out this evening."
4. Corporate Life: Most of us work for companies that trade in the world's marketplace, serving the unseen god of Adam Smith's invisible hand that encourages production, consumption, and shareholder profits. Not-for-profits are not immune, for we take our cues from our for-profit big brothers.
  - a. Corporate America talks about maximizing income streams while cutting costs, extending credit to levels unparalleled in world history, pounding the middle class

- into bankruptcy and poverty, and completely obliterating the poor.
- b. Corporate boardrooms become shrines to confrontation; where some dominate and others are eaten alive.
  - c. Responsibility has become monolithic; that is, it only extends to share holder profits. Responsibility recedes and leaves employees and customers vulnerable to abuse and fraud.
  - d. You may dismiss these observations to a ranting liberal preacher, but I know that I have history on my side. Donald Trump's show "The Apprentice" was preceded by Enron, Worldcom, Adelphia, and Arthur Anderson. This was preceded by the Savings and Loan bailout, which was, in turn, preceded by Chryslers bailout. My own beloved railroads are just as guilty, being bailed out in the same era as Chrysler with the formation of Conrail. Examples go back in history to the Great Depression, and before that, the robber barons and oil monopolies.
  - e. All of which is to say, the corporate world is just as dog-eat-dog ugly as is the injustice inflicted upon the poor, and the violence and war waged on each other, often times in the name of God.
5. Politics: I save politics for last, because it has become so poisoned and polarized that it makes it almost impossible to discuss civilly in public, let alone in the church. What ever your political persuasion is, there are those who preach that when it comes to playing politics there are only winners and losers. Winning comes only when you dominate the opposition. Some would even suggest that winning comes only when you eliminate the opposition.
- a. You want dog-eat-dog? Just run for political office. If you can't stomach watching sausage being made, keep out of politics! In fact, it's probably better if you don't even raise the topic.
  - b. And I think to myself, "how sad, that we have descended to such primitive levels that we can't even talk about working together for the public good.

We live in a sheltered faith community; tolerant, accepting, forgiving and loving. There is no doubt about it that what we have going here at Zion is something that is unique and exceptional in today's world. Lot's of other congregations long to have what we have in our church; they'd give their right arm to have the same environment for ministry.

1. There is a tremendous amount of toleration here at Zion. We don't all agree, but there is such wide and deep respect for each other, that we tolerate a great deal to ensure stability and health.
2. With toleration, we've all come to appreciate the immense diversity of God and movement of the Holy Spirit. We can experience the presence of God even in the midst of seemingly irreconcilable differences.
3. The accepting nature of our congregation does have it limits. We are accepting of others, so long as our acceptance doesn't allow hatred, hurt or violence to enter in.
4. We love and forgive, and teach our children to love and forgive, which is exactly what Jesus asks of his followers. Forgiveness and love comes first from Christ, overflows into the lives of each other, and, though our evangelical, missional efforts become the source and supply of forgiveness and love for the world.

On the one hand, we live in an aggressive, dog-eat-dog world. On the other hand, we live in a

sheltered, ideal Christian community defined by toleration, forgiveness, and love. We would be living in a state of denial if we believed the two worlds would never collide.

What are we to do?

It is ironic that while our Gospel lesson holds up the dissonance between our Jekyll and Hyde worlds, our Epistle Lesson this morning holds the key. The apostle Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus, in particular, and to all the new churches in Asia Minor, in general, in an effort to map out exactly what are the expectations, the rights and responsibilities, of living as Christ's disciples in Christian communities, in the midst of a hostile and violent world. Paul sheds some significant light that we might profit.

1. First, act like we are children of our Heavenly Father.
  - a. We've been adopted as God's own children. God has claimed and named us as if we were God's biological children. Shouldn't we treat God with the same respect, love, and kindness that we would treat our biological parents? Shouldn't we behave as family according to the best family behavior blood would treat blood?
  - b. God didn't have to choose us, to be our adoptive parent. God knew our faults and blemishes, and chose us anyways. Now, if that isn't love, I don't know what is.
  - c. Just as God loves us, so too, should we reflect that love back to our Heavenly Father.
2. Secondly, follow the will of God. Paul writes, "With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will" (v.8, 9)
  - a. Do you really think that those thoughts in your head are a conscience? Oh, please. It is God speaking to you. When thoughts are conflicted, it is a struggle of the will. Suppress your human will; submit to the will of God.
  - b. Do you really think that there are coincidences in this world? Oh, please. These are God-incidences. People enter our world. Doors open, and some doors close.
3. Thirdly, live in God's grace; his glorious grace he so freely bestows upon us.
  - a. It is by God's grace that your sins are forgiven, if only you ask. It is by God's grace that Christ took your sins away through his death upon the cross. It is by God's grace that by his son's death your slate has been washed clean and we are freed from our past, of our prior sins.
  - b. And it is by God's grace that we have the strength to avoid temptation to sin in the future, that we can honor our will to repent and sin no more, that we might allow His will to turn us before we fail.
4. Be assured, in the fullness of time, God will gather all things to Him.
  - a. The grave will not hold us. Death has lost its sting. By the resurrection of Christ, we are given the gift of eternal life.
  - b. This which we call eternal life doesn't begin when we die, it begins when we are saved by the grace of God, when we claim Jesus as our Lord and Savior.
  - c. Eternal life is lived in the here and now, for we are already being gathered by God.
  - d. We are being gathered on heaven's bright shore, where there is no sorrow, no suffering, no illness or death.
  - e. On heaven's bright shore we are gathered together with those who've gone before us. Our eyes may not be opened to see the Saints, but have no doubt, they are with us, working by our side, also waiting for the day when our eyes will be

opened.

It is the Christian, and only the disciple of Christ, that can see that the intersection of the world with the life of faith takes place at the cross of Calvary. On the one hand, we have the incredible violence of the world – a bloody, unjust crucifixion. On the other, we have the incredible sacrificial love that can only come from a loving, benevolent Heavenly Father.

To live in one world and not the other is a strategy hell-bent for destruction. The world will eat you up, chew you up, grind you up, spit you out and leave you for dead – and laugh at you as it spits on your dead body and leaves you for dead. The world will cut your head off and serve it up on a platter.

A faith absent from the world makes one a zealot, a Jesus freak, a mystic, or a cloistered hermit. Faith without application, or faith without works, makes one irrelevant. Faith that is unconnected allows misguided sheep to follow charismatic shepherds, who are really wolves dressed in shepherds clothing; the Pat Robertsons, Jerry Falwells and Jim Bakkers, Branch Davidians, Jonestown, and Millerites in recent times. History is full of false messiahs who lead the faithful astray.

The apostle Paul speaks about being in the world, but not of the world. He speaks of a faith that while opposed to the world, at the same time, is a faith that must be necessarily be engaged in the world, to transform the world.

No doubt about it, we are called to walk a tricky high-wire if we are going to take the cross of Christ seriously. It is not a walk for those who are uncommitted or easily distracted. But it is a walk that is worth our efforts.

My beloved, be in the world, but don't allow yourselves to become consumed by the world. Be in the world, and, at the same time, be the conduit through which Christ can work to transform this world. For where the world and faith intersect, at the cross of Jesus Christ, this is the only place where hope can be found.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.