

March 5, 2023

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

The Adoptive Spirit

John 15:16-17

“You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you this command so that you may love one another.”

Romans 8:14-17

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry “Abba” (Daddy) it is that very spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are all children of God and if so, then inheritors of God through Christ...”

Because I believe in the power of love,
I believe in the freedom of choice.

Because I believe in the power of faith,
I must believe in the sanctity of free choice.

Faith is truly faith - only if it is freely chosen.
Otherwise it is coercion - or blind obedience -
or just going along with the crowd.

Love is truly love - only if it is freely given by choice.
Otherwise it is desperation - or slavery -
or lack of other options.

And of all the expressions of freely chosen faith
and freely given love - one of the greatest is Adoption.

Says Jody Cantrell Dyer,

“Adoption is the most intentional process on Earth.”

One grown-up adult who was adopted as a child
celebrated it this way.

“I was chosen, I was wanted, I was cherished.

**I grew in my family’s hearts because I was their
missing piece. I knew I was loved**

BECAUSE I was adopted.”

Theologian John Piper puts it in indisputable Christian
terms when he says,

“Adoption is the gospel made visible”. (repeat)

That’s pretty powerful stuff!

But, for many Christians, it may be a new way

of understanding the meaning of the Gospel!

Many Christians may think the Gospel is about personal salvation of our souls, or a private belief in Jesus as Christ as Lord, or securing one's place in heaven.

But we don't often think the good news of Jesus is about adoption?

Why is adoption **the gospel made visible?**

Well, let's think about it.

1st of all, how often the bible commands it:

-Deut. 10:18

“God executes justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the stranger and sojourner...(therefore) any of such who are within your towns shall come and eat and be filled.

The Lord God will bless all hands that do so.”

- Psalm 68:5

“God commits himself to the fatherless and protects the widows.

- Psalm 82: 3

“Give justice to the weak and fatherless and deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

And the Epistle of James (the brother of Jesus) Chpt. 1 vs. 26 ff. put it in no uncertain terms:

“If anyone thinks he is religious...(and their religion) is pure

*and undefiled before God the Father...care for the orphan
and the widow and keep one's self unstained
from the world..."*

These commandments were based in a horrible reality.

There was an epidemic of abandoned children.

Many - especially little girls - were abandoned at birth -
and often left in public places,

like the town square, or even on garbage heaps,

either to die of exposure

or be picked up by strangers

who would raise them, if they were boys,

to be laborers in the fields,

or, if they were girls, to be prostitutes

So it became, for Christians, one of their good reputations
to adopt orphans and provide loving surrogate families.

It is safe to say the early church was created

BY ADOPTION.

But the reason why Christians helped widows & orphans
goes ever deeper than this.

It points directly to the nature of God.

The God of the Jews and the God of Jesus

was the **ULTIMATE ADOPTER!**

The word "Hebrew" means "one who traverses & wanders".

Abraham was the first to be called "Hebrew".

And God adopted Abraham and all those who wandered
with him, blood family and servants together,
a rag-tag poly-glot people,
who became “Israel” - “God’s chosen people”.
The apostle Paul summerized them this way:
“To the Israelites belongs the glorious adoption (by God).”

Then later, Christians saw Jesus as the great adopter too.

*“You did not choose me, but I chose you...
(therefore) love as I have loved you.”*

Again, Paul put’s this into perspective:

*“You received a spirit of adoption.
When we cry “Abba” (Daddy) it is that very spirit
bearing witness with our’s
that we are all children of God
and if so, then inheritors of God through Christ...”*

Let me put it this way;

It’s difficult for Christians to call themselves “Christian”,
until they feel ADOPTED!

Which also means they must realize
their abandonment and lostness before then.

But I’ll bet most Christians don’t think about their faith
in those terms.

Most don’t think about the church as their
“adoptive family”.

It makes me wonder,
how and when the church lost this key identity?
How did Christianity lose its sacred adoptive spirit?

One can only guess.

Perhaps it was when we made our faith so spiritualized
that we lost the ethical.

We made it all about something inside us,
like saving our souls,
or something after this life not during it,
that we lost sight of the crucial commands
for how to love one another.

Or perhaps it was because we privatized our faith.
We made it so much about our own nuclear families;
our own idyllic dreams of 2.3 children, a pet dog
and a nice picket fence,
that we lost sight of the original Jesus community
who saw itself as surrogate family
for all who were cast aside, left to die,
marginalized and abandoned by society?

Or perhaps was it because so many cultures
put so much emphasis on blood-lines.
So many make their religion, their politics, their
sociology about racial or ethnic purity
that we lost sight of the importance of love-lines.

Who knows why and how we lost our adoptive spirit
but it's high time we get it back.

Because the peace of the whole world depends upon
all peoples to live like surrogate family.

So why shouldn't this begin with us?

It's high time all churches became
welcoming to all who are un-welcomed,
affirming to all who are shunned and abandoned.

It's high time Christians became an example
of love-lines over blood-lines.

And most of all, it's high time all Christians
who feel adopted by God through Jesus Christ,
keep the adoptive spirit alive
by legally adopting.

According to UNICEF
there are 153 million orphans worldwide.
And the church's sacred command
is to mightily support all those families
- gay or straight - who adopt.

But it's larger than just this. It's a spirit we share.
It's The Adoptive Spirit.

Let me tell you about "The Muriel Committee".

During Covid, when Muriel Roeth was declining,
it became clear to many of us who loved her,

that she needed help living at home.

But her niece, who was her legal authority,
lived an hour away and was immuno-compromised,
and so it was impossible for her to be Muriel's
daily, hands-on care-giver.

So she asked us, who had strong love-lines to Muriel,
if we could help.

Thus, we created "The Muriel Committee",
a group of 6, who met once a month, over Zoom,
and divied-up weekly household care,
assigned driving her to appointments,
brought in food,
and basically became Muriel's surrogate family.

She was able to live for most of the year
with the committee's help,
until her niece was able to move her to
Equinox Terrace.

So, to share a final perspective,
today is a great day of adoption
for one dear little girl and her new family;
Sophia and the Limas.
But there's a larger reality to celebrate.

No one goes around our church with a sign on them,
saying, "Hi! I'm adopted."
So besides myself, most of you wouldn't know

how many of our fellow church-members
were adopted or adoptees.

Trust me, the number is large -
so many it might surprise you.

And it makes me wonder
if that's a contributing factor to making Dorset Church
such a welcoming church,
and why this congregation feels like a surrogate family
to so many.

And so, in the end, it's not about WEARING a sign,
it's about BEING a sign -
a sign of God's adoptive spirit!

Amen.

Prayer of Pastoral Care March 5, 2023 Lent 2

Psalm 121 asks, *From where will our help come? Our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. God will keep our going out and our coming in from this time on and forevermore.* Our prayer response is: God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

God our Helper, we thank you for keeping our lives always in your care and protection. We pray for any and all who are in harm's way. For those walking in the midst of danger; for those who are exhausted and seeking relief; for those who face a mountain of worry or debt or any other obstacles. Be Guardian and Guide, we pray, setting all our feet on your paths of peace. God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are struggling with a new challenge or call; with a major transition in life; with questioning their faith; with grief, old or new. Keep in your tender care and mercy, O God, those who are sick in mind, body, or spirit; those weighed down by depression or pain.

God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

Protect not only us and those we love, but also the whole wide world you so love. In places of war, bring peace. We pray for all in Ukraine, both soldiers, and citizens, that they may be helped to endure. Be with the leaders and people of Russia that they may be led to justice and peace. We pray for all in our world who live in areas of conflict, and in places of natural disaster: especially with those continuing to suffer from the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. Bring restoration and calm, we pray. Be with all victims of the head-on train collision in this week in Greece. Uphold those working for railway safety. God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We thank you for all who increase their family's circle of love and caring through adoption, and for those who provide foster care to children in need. As we pray for our families, we include migrant children and young people separated from parents at the border. Be with those seeking to attend school, yet who often become under-age employees working long hours, with safety risks, paying debts to their sponsors. We also pray safety for those who have been poisoned while studying in a Girls' School in Iran. God of Compassion, **hear our prayer.**

We lift before you those on this church's immediate needs list.

Where hope has grown tired and thin, lift our sights so that we may see true hope. In the name of Jesus, we bring our prayers.

Amen.

HYMN # 365 Wash, O God, Your Sons and Daughters

OFFERING In faith and gratitude, let us now return a portion of what we have so abundantly received, as heirs and adopted children of God's family.

***DOXOLOGY**

***PRAYER** Gracious God, with our gifts, we dedicate ourselves, in deep gratitude—for your call on our lives, your guidance in the baptismal journey, and for blessing us that we may be a blessing to others. Accept what we bring for your own good purposes. In Christ we pray. Amen.

COMMUNION HYMN # 425 (1st verse) Let Us Break Bread Together

