

## **Hospitality and Adoption**

*Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast*

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### **Hosea 11:1-11** CEB

- 1 When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.
- 2 The more I called them,  
the further they went from me;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
and they burned incense to idols.
- 3 Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk;  
I took them up in my arms,  
but they did not know that I healed them.
- 4 I led them with bands of human kindness,  
with cords of love.  
I treated them like those who lift infants to their cheeks;  
I bent down to them and fed them.
  
- 5 They will return to the land of Egypt,  
and Assyria will be their king,  
because they have refused to return to me.
- 6 The sword will strike wildly in their cities;  
it will consume the bars of their gates  
and will take everything because of their schemes.
- 7 My people are bent on turning away from me;  
and though they cry out to the Most High,  
he will not raise them up.
  
- 8 How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel?  
How can I make you like Admah?  
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?  
My heart winces within me;  
my compassion grows warm and tender.
- 9 I won't act on the heat of my anger;  
I won't return to destroy Ephraim;  
for I am God and not a human being,

the holy one in your midst;  
I won't come in harsh judgment.

- 10 They will walk after the Lord,  
who roars like a lion.  
When he roars,  
his children will come trembling from the west.
- 11 They will come trembling like a bird,  
and like a dove from the land of Assyria;  
and I will return them to their homes,  
says the Lord.

### **Ephesians 1:3-14**

*The Apostle Paul was overwhelmed, overwhelmed by the grace of God and how it was reaching far and wide, including to the city of Ephesus. He wrote the Christians there.*

Let nothing but good be said about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In heaven he has spoken a good word over us in Christ in the form of every spiritual good, just as he chose us in him, prior to the world's foundation, to be holy and blameless before him in love, deciding ahead of time on our adoption as his through Jesus Christ, in keeping with his good will, so that his magnificent favor would be recognized, by which he favored us in the One he loves.

In him, by his blood, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, through his abundant favor, which he poured out to us, in keeping with his good pleasure, making known to us with complete wisdom and understanding, his hidden will, which he planned in him as an arrangement for the fullness of time: to sum up everything in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him.

Also, in him we have come into an inheritance, something decided about us through the plan of the One who works everything out according to his own intentions, so that, as the first to hope in Christ, we might live for the recognition of his magnificence.

In him, you also, when you heard the true word, the good news of your salvation – in him, you also, when you put faith in him, were sealed with the promised holy Spirit, who is the pledge of our inheritance, of our redemption as his own possession, all for the recognition of his magnificence.

### **Sermon**

One of the first things the Bible says about human beings is that it isn't good for us to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Put another way, we human beings need a home. We need people and a place where we belong.

**MUCH OF THE BIBLICAL STORY** is about home and homelessness. At the very beginning, the Bible shows us a man and a woman welcomed into their new home (Genesis 1,2), then quickly driven from it (Genesis 3).

When the story shifts to Abraham and his descendants, we find them wandering (Genesis 12ff.), we find them enslaved (Exodus 1), and then we find them wandering again (Numbers 14). And always we find them wanting to go home, to the home God promised them.

When the story turns to Israel in the land of Canaan, we see them having a hard time settling down (Joshua, Judges), we see them being driven out (2 Kings 17, 25), and we see them not so enthused about returning home to give it another try (Ezra, Nehemiah).

But there is hope. Prophets picture King David's ruined dwelling set up again by God (cf. Amos 9:11). And they picture people coming from every direction to a rebuilt Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 43:5-7; 60:1-7; 61:1-7). Hosea says it as well as any:

*When [the LORD] roars,  
his children will come trembling from the west.  
They will come trembling like birds from Egypt,  
and like doves from the land of Assyria;  
and I will return them to their homes,  
says the LORD (Hosea 11:10b-11).*

The Bible's final picture is a new Jerusalem planted on a new earth (Revelation 21). In that city, God will be at home. And in that city, all peoples will be at home with God.

This biblical story about home and homelessness is the story we inhabit. We trust it to be a story with a happy ending. And we trust that, because of Jesus Christ, we will be part of that happy ending. But how can that be? The answer is in another picture, another picture that's related to home.

**THE PICTURE I HAVE IN MIND** is family. Last week, we heard some words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia. He said that everyone who has faith – and by that he meant everyone who hears and trusts what God is saying and doing through Jesus Christ – all people who have this faith belong to Abraham's family.

When he wrote to the church in Ephesus, the apostle expanded on this idea. It's not just the family of Abraham, it's the family of God. Through Jesus Christ, we are part of the family of God. Jesus is the Son of God, the unique only-begotten Son, the only everlasting Child of the Father. But we, too, are children of God, daughters and sons of the Father. Only, in our case, we are children by adoption.

**IDEAS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT ADOPTION** have been changing in recent years. There was a time when about the worst thing you could say to a child was that she was adopted. Adoption carried a stigma. Adoption meant that you had been rejected by

your mother and father. Maybe your father never knew about you. Maybe your father never wanted to know about you. But your mother, she knew about you. She gave birth to you. Then she gave you away. Maybe she had her reasons. Maybe they were really good reasons. Still, she obviously didn't love you enough to keep you. Ideas like those went through the heads of boys and girls who learned that they had been adopted. So for the most part, adoption was kept secret.

But even if all those tormenting ideas are true – and sadly, sometimes they are – even if all those tormenting ideas are true, they're only part of the story of a child's adoption. And they're not the most important part.

I heard an interview last week with Walter Isaacson. He wrote a biography of Steve Jobs, the co-founder of the Apple computer corporation, who died last month. When Jobs was born in 1955, his unmarried parents gave him up for adoption. He learned about the adoption when he was six years old. He took it as bad news, news that he was unwanted, news that he had been abandoned. But his adoptive parents made sure to tell him the rest of the story. And they helped him take it to heart.

The rest of the story was this. Jobs had not been rejected. And he had not been abandoned. Instead he had been chosen, chosen by his adoptive parents, chosen to be part of their family, chosen to be the object of their love.

**AGAIN, THE BIBLICAL STORY ABOUT** humanity is a story of homelessness. It's a story of exile. It's a story of not belonging, a story of being alone. And that's not just the big-picture story of humanity. That's the story we experience again and again in our lives.

Some of us are still in school. Many of us have lingering memories of school. Some of those memories still hurt. Maybe it happened in gym class, when it was time to choose sides for basketball. And the team captains looked right through you like you weren't even there. And you were the last one to be chosen. Only you weren't really chosen. It's just that you were left over, and they had to put you on one of the teams.

And that sort of thing doesn't happen only when we're young. How many old men and old women don't spend long days in a retirement home or a nursing home, watching the door? But nobody comes. Nobody chooses to visit them. And they feel all alone. They feel like they don't belong with anyone anywhere any more. How strange that we call them nursing *homes*, that we call them retirement *homes*! No one who lives in one feels at home at all.

**BUT IT'S DIFFERENT IF YOU'VE** been adopted. To be adopted is to be chosen. To be adopted is to be wanted. To be adopted is to be loved.

The apostle says that Christians are children of God by adoption. Maybe our family of origin didn't treat us well. We were cast off, abandoned, set adrift. But, says the apostle, we have been chosen, chosen by God. What's more, this is no accident. God

didn't just happen to stumble across us. God didn't just happen to notice that no one had picked us and out of pity to say, "Okay, you can be on my team."

No, God chose us before the world's foundation. Before the Big Bang or whatever means God used to light the stars on fire, before any and all of that, God had us in mind. Had us in mind, not just that some day we would be, but that some day we would be God's children, that some day Jesus Christ would rescue us from the darkness of sin and depravity, that some day Jesus Christ would deliver us from judgment and dress us up for worship.

To be adopted means to be wanted, to be especially and specifically wanted. To be adopted means to be fed and dressed, to be rocked to sleep and tucked in, to be included in family celebrations, to be included in the family's struggles and work. To be adopted means to find yourself, somehow, apart from your own choosing, apart from your own decision – to be adopted means to find yourself, somehow, home.

**OVER THE YEARS, I'VE KNOWN** lots of parents who have adopted children. My Aunt Betty and Uncle Everett tried for years to have children. One child after another was miscarried or born to live only a few hours or a few days. In the end, they adopted my cousin Danny. They gave him love. They gave him a home. They gave him a life.

Jan and I have friends who adopted two sisters to join with the two sons who had been born to them. They welcomed their new daughters with deep love and with a passionate commitment to help them get beyond the torments of their first years. The path since then has been very difficult. Our friends have been tested at every turn. They've made mistakes. But their love and commitment have been persistent. That's what happens with adoption.

Or that's what's supposed to happen. It's certainly what happens when God adopts us as his children. God is patient with us. God doesn't let go of us. God doesn't turn his back on us. God is with us, as he was with Israel. Israel had rejected God, turned away from God. Despite all of God's pleading, they refused to return. God had every right to cut them off, every right to banish them from home forever. But he couldn't, just couldn't, bring himself to do it:

*How can I give you up?*

*How can I hand you over?*

*My heart winces within me;*

*my compassion grows warm and tender (Hosea 11:8).*

And it's no wonder. Because God's love is genuine. God's love is persistent. God starts out loving and will not stop.

*When Israel was a child, I loved him.*

*I taught [him] to walk.*

*I took them up in my arms.*

*I led them with bands of human kindness,  
with cords of love.*

*I bent down to them and fed them (Hosea 11:1,3,4).*

Adoption is an act of love. Adoption is an act of mercy. Adoption is also an act of hospitality. To adopt someone is to open your home to them, to welcome them to its blessings and its comforts, to welcome them to its work and its worries, to welcome them not as a guest, but as part of the family, to welcome them into your home as someone who belongs there for good. Which is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

**HAVE YOU PUT FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST** as the God-given hope of the world? Have you been sealed with the Holy Spirit? (Remember, your faith is the sure sign of the Spirit's presence.) Then you are a child of God. And all of this is because God has chosen you! God has chosen you to be adopted into his family, chosen you before he started to construct the universe, chosen you to be the object of his love, chosen to welcome you into his home, the home that awaits us, where we will belong forever.

How magnificent is our God! The Father, who chooses us. Jesus the Son, who saves us. And the Holy Spirit, who joins us to the family of God through faith.