

Sermon ✝ July 11, 2021
Ephesians 1:3-14
Frank Maxwell

It was a playground ritual that was observed almost every day during our 15 minute recess period. It was the choosing of sides for softball and it was one of the rites of elementary school.

As the bell for recess sounded, all of the kids who wished to be part of a team lined up alongside the fence on the south end of the playground. By show of hands, the entire assembly picked captains. (It was usually the same two popular boys).

The captains would then stand facing the would-be ball players and the *choosing* process would commence. The first few picked for each team would always be "best friends" of the captains. As their names were called, they would smugly take their rightful place behind their respective best friends.

Following the choosing of the first few draft picks, hands would fly into the air as kids yelled out, "Choose me! Choose me!". It was very important to be chosen early on in the process. To be picked toward the end meant that either you weren't a very good ball player or (God forbid) you weren't popular. And the greatest shame that could befall a young, would-be baseball superstar . . . was, of course, the dreaded last pick.

At this point in the story may I remind you that I was a chubby little guy with a lisp and not very swift on my feet. Besides that I was left-handed . . . a kind of freak of nature . . . who didn't have a left-handed baseball glove. My father thought being left-handed was some kind of an anomaly and so he always bought me right-handed gloves with hopes that some day I would be "cured" of my left-handed ways.

By the time I was in the third or fourth grade, I had become very familiar with being the last one chosen. Of course, it hurt. But being the optimistic guy I am, I put myself through the torturous selection process day after day . . . always hopeful that somebody would eventually come to their senses and realize they were daily passing by a wealth of undiscovered, raw talent.

Oh, well, it was not to be. Over the years, the hurt has gone away . . . but I have never forgotten how it felt *not* to be chosen. And maybe that's why these verses from Ephesians have always held extra special meaning for me.

Listen again to verse 5: "*God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.*" I find that incredibly exciting! We have been chosen—ahead of time if you will—to be on God's team. Only some of us have chosen free agent status.

This one, single sentence is packed with all kinds emotion and good news. The entire passage is filled with wonderful images. I could easily spend an hour or so talking about all of this.

For today, I'd like to concentrate on just a few significant words from verse 5. "*God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.*"

"*Destined us for adoption . . .*" The Greek word is pronounced pro-or-id-zo and it means to predetermine . . . to choose ahead of time.

Simply stated, right from the start of time, it was God's plan that our relationship with God would be special. It also means that each and every one of us is a "first pick". Notice also that we aren't given some specific number that limits how many are chosen . . . we are all chosen. Not only are we destined to be chosen . . . we have been adopted.

Over the years, I have been part of the adoption process as a reference for parishioners hoping to adopt. It is a long, laborious process. For a couple to adopt a child through Lutheran Social Services in the State of Wisconsin:

- They must fill out detailed and lengthy accounts of their own lives, family history and why they think they would be good parents.
- They must apply to become foster parents and abide by all of the state regulations for such homes.
- They must provide the adoptive agency with access to all financial records, proof of employment and the assurance that they have never been convicted of a felony.
- They must submit to an inspection of their home which includes displaying their fire-escape plan.
- They must be interviewed by social workers and other agency professionals.

I'm not saying that parents who are gifted children through the birth process love their children less than parents who adopt . . .but parents who adopt must be willing to demonstrate, in no uncertain terms, their ability to parent. To submit to such a process says a great deal about their commitment to their child.

And scripture is very specific here . . . the word is *adoption* . . . even in the original Greek text. For me, it again, underscores the level of God's commitment toward those whom God calls children.

Verse 5 ends with this beautiful phrase: "(God does all of this) *according to the good pleasure of his will.*"

God is very serious about this business of choosing us. God is happy to do it, as in, *"It is my pleasure"*. It means that God planned right from the start to enter into relationship with us, God adopted us, and God feels very good about this decision.

Now, having said all of this, we need to again be reminded that while God chooses us . . . we do not have to choose God. It's up to us. It's this "free will" thing. It is our choice to say "no" to God.

But, even that doesn't mean that God will give up on us . . .

I am reminded of the story of family who adopted many older children. One particular boy had been in many foster homes when he came to live with this family. They adopted him.

One day, upon arriving home, the father saw the garden hose leading from the front of the house winding around to the back. Following the hose, he found their newly adopted son aiming the hose into a bedroom window with water was squirting full blast into the house.

Caught in the act, the boy gave the dad one of those looks that children give when they are caught in the act. Waiting for his scolding, the boy was amazed by the words that came from his fathers lips: *"No matter what you do, I won't send you back. You belong here."*

Beautiful words . . . grace-filled words. The father was saying to his son: *"You are mine, I have chosen you . . . adopted you. I will never abandon you."* These were re-assuring words which reflected the good pleasure of a loving father's will.

I would venture to guess that many you, like me, were not always the first ones to be picked for baseball, kickball, student council, a business promotion or whatever. For some of us, this has eaten away our self-esteem. Others, perhaps, have always had the feeling of being only second or third best . . . never quite measuring up to some arbitrary societal standard.

May you this day and forever more, along with me, hear the wondrous good news. Our God is a God who loves us all and who chooses us all.

There are no favorites on God's team . . . each person is unique and appreciated for their own special gifts.

Each and every person has worth and value in God's eyes. And don't let anybody ever try to tell you differently.

We have been chosen by God, now and for all time. What God does for us is because God loves us . . . according to the good pleasure of his will.

Amen.