

SERMON – January 3, 2010 - “We Belong To God” –
Text: Ephesians 1:3-14

One of my favorite days of the year is News Year Day, simply because I don't do anything but relax and while Tom is enjoying a good college foot ball game, I am sitting down to enjoy a good book or movie. Several years ago I watched with my daughter, Juliann, a movie, “A Walk to Remember”. It is a romance about a geek girl and a hip boy falling in love and discovering the joy of this love even though the girl is dieing from leukemia. What made this girl a geek were not only her plain dated clothes, but also her Christian faith. You see she was a preacher's daughter. She attended church not because she had to, but because she sincerely wanted to. She was made fun of and to be seen with her was to be considered keeke as well. She was affected by a cruel joke that was played on her. But she had unshakable faith. She was ok with her self, because she knew she belonged to God and that she was ok with God.

As I reflected on this movie I saw her represent what it is like for us as Christians living in today's society. It used to be that being a Christian meant you fit in society. We pledged allegiance under God. We took oaths on the Bible. And the high moral belief of Christians was seen as admirable. But, today it seems more and more we are living in a foreign land. We no longer fit in. Christians are seen as being out of touch with reality, narrow-minded, and bigoted. The press only holds up what is considered true representative of Christian faith as the very conservative Christian. We moderates and progressives stand out as the geek kid in school. People are quick to make judgments about us, without even getting to know us. And of course they have

no desire to get to know us because we are out of step. We are seen as undesirable. We fear, rejection, so we remain hidden.

As Christians, it is our inclination to lament this shift, and rightly so. It is painful and lonely to be relegated to the periphery of society. In fact, when pressed to the extreme it can be downright frightening. And yet, in a strange way this change in our circumstance can serve a useful purpose if it helps us identify with believers of other generations and cultures whose standing in their societies were as marginal or even more than our own. It can serve a useful purpose if it connects us more intimately to the abiding love of God.

Consider the exiled Israelites. They lived out their faith and lives in a totally different nation and culture. They had to learn how to sing praises to their God while being on the fringe of the society they now found themselves in. Now consider the Christians in Ephesus. They were surrounded by people who worshipped at the temple of Diana; they were orphaned from their non-believing families, and friends, and generally alienated from the mainstream of society. Distrusted, despised, and disenfranchised, life for them was a lonely and often times terrifying ordeal. They must have asked themselves the kind of questions that we, in our generation, increasingly find ourselves asking; “Are we a relic?” “Does any one care, especially care about people of faith”? What happened to our popularity in the fifties and sixties? Are we doomed to die? Are we as a church, going to be alright?”

The writer of Ephesians responds to these questions with a resounding yes! He writes “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ....who

chose us in Christ before the foundations of the world...destined us for adoption as his children. We belong to God. We belong to God, always have been, and always will be, forever.

When we celebrate baptism there is a part of the Sacrament, when I say “Child of the covenant, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and marked as Christ’s forever.” At that point I make the sign of the cross on the forehead. We in our baptism no longer belong to society, or to ourselves, we belong to God through Jesus Christ.

What this means is that God knows us intimately, even knew us before our time on earth, and cares for us, and is with us, always. We are not abandoned to the cares and whims of society. We belong now and forever to the everlasting, Almighty God, who created the entire universe. We are God’s forever.

What more reassuring word of comfort could a disenfranchised believer hear than this? We matter deeply to God and nothing can or will separate us from this abiding presence. And we are gifted with every spiritual blessing: glorious grace that God gives to us all the time, the forgiveness of our sins, and all wisdom and insight as God has made known to us in the mystery of God’s will. This is forever. These gifts are not transitory. These are the gifts given to us that mark us, as God’s own.

Because of the assurance that we belong to God then we can be true to our beliefs even if others mock us. We can dare to step forward and work for God’s justice and peace even though the odds are great. We can dare to try new

ways of doing and being church because we are safe in the arms of God all the way through the scary time of change. We can speak of our faith to others because we are firmly grounded in who loves us. We can be the loving disciples that Christ calls us to be because we belong not to our families, not to our friends, not to ourselves, not to society. No! We belong to God forever!

Now what is your response to such belonging and the spiritual blessings, and the new freedom found in this living? It is as simple as what our parents taught us and still trying to teach us, say thank you. Praise God and give thanks for these wonderful gifts! Singing our songs of praise is doing just this. Through singing we are giving thanks to God for the wonderful gift of salvation. We are no longer alone to our own devices, we are set free in forgiveness to live different lives.

After we respond to praise and thanksgiving then let us go in confidence to be who we are, beloved adopted children of God. Adopted through Christ. You know this language never made sense to me until I learned a little about shepherding. If there was a lamb who did not have a mother, and there was a mother sheep who lost her lamb to death the only way adoption of the orphaned lamb, by the lambless sheep too place was to wash the orphan lamb in the blood of the dead lamb. Then and only then would the lambless mother sheep adopt the orphaned lamb as her own.

We have been washed in Christ's blood through our baptism. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that we experience in baptism, we belong to God. God sees us not as unwanted children, but as God's own child. Now

let us go to live as God's own children. We aren't the keeke children that the world sees. We are the beloved children of God. So as we face uncertainty in the New Year, as we face new challenges of the New Year, as we face antagonism of society and fear of the future, and apathy of many of those who are called Christian, let us remember who we are, beloved children of God. Let us know we have nothing to fear even if the earth should change and the mountains shake in the heart of the sea. Psalm 46:2.

In a few moments we will come to the Lord's Table. This is the place where we remember and realize whose we are. We are God's children, adopted in the blood of Christ. We come to realize that we do not deserve this privilege, it is simply given to us. As we realize this gift of salvation we are overwhelmed with emotion of praise and thanksgiving. Let us come to the table to begin the New Year in joy remembering we belong to God. God cares, God listens to our prayers. God continues to work in the world through us. We may look like geeks to the people outside of this church, but we are the extension of God's grace out into the world so that others may come to know that they belong to God as well.

Let us leave from the table with our heads held high singing praises to God for the baby boy of Mary, who came to save us and to call us to be God's beloved children.

Let us pray.