*Adopted by Grace*  Homecrest PC

*Genesis 28:10-19* and *Romans 8:12-25* 7/23/17

 A few weeks ago, one of my friends was in Nanjing, China, not for vacation, business trip or study, but she served as a volunteer translator for an international adoption agency. Her job was to facilitate couples from the US who are in the process of adopting children from overseas and bringing their newly adopted children safely to the US. Since my friend is fluent in English and Mandarin, she has been assigned to help with the adoption agency in China. This by far has been the most rewarding experience in my friend’s life, helping to unite families who are destined to be together, even though they were born under various circumstances and in different parts of the world.

 Sadly many of these orphan children were either abandoned at birth and abused by their birth parents, or because of their physical abnormality or simply because of their gender, but that doesn’t take away the fact that every children deserves to be loved by both his or her earthly parents, whether biological or adopted, as well as the heavenly parent.

 From a theological standpoint, the term “adoption” has been used frequently to describe God’s relationship with God’s people. As Galatians 3:29 reminds us that *“if we belong to Christ, then we are Abraham's offspring, [children] heirs according to [God’s] the promise.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* Through our baptism, we have been assured a place in **the household of God and as sons and daughters of God.** We share a portion of our Heavenly parent’s inheritance and blessing for our future.

 In the passage that we just read earlier, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are all spiritually adopted by God as God’s children. In spite of our many flaws and imperfections, God continues to embrace us just as we are, as God’s children and as inheritors of God’s kingdom.

 Keep in mind that many of these early Gentile Christians were also under persecution at the time because of their faith. Paul re-assured them that even though they may not share the same pedigree as their Jewish counterparts, they were all equally shared as the inheritors of God’s promise, as adopted sons and daughters of God.

If you think about it, this was revolutionary concept that transformed the whole message of God’s salvation for humanity. As adopted children of God, through our baptism, you and I are part of that beneficiary of blessings.

 Furthermore, Paul used the metaphor of a woman who’s about to give birth to describe the **longing**, the **anticipation**, as well as the **joy** of what is to come. We all have something to look forward to beyond the present life, even through our various forms of suffering and afflictions. **We have the HOPE based on what is unseen before our eyes and we have the FAITH to endure with patience.[[2]](#footnote-2)**

 Paul went on to give us a few practical advices in which we can strive towards our Godly characters. We are to **love what is genuine, hate what is evil, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer, offer hospitality to strangers, bless those who persecute us,** and perhaps the hardest of all, **“live peaceably with all”**. That’s what living in Christ and having Christ live in us mean for us. Christ has given us this new hope through our redemption in God’s grace!

In our Old Testament reading today from the Book of *Genesis*, we read about Jacob’s famous God encountering moment through his vision. Before we go on, we must look back into what was happening prior to this. Jacob, as you remember was the one who tricked his brother - Esau for his birthright in receiving the special blessing from his father, Isaac. This special blessing was only reserved to the firstborn son, who was the legitimate heir to the father’s inheritance. As Isaac was tricked by his younger son Jacob, by offering his blessing, “*May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. 4 May [God] give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien -- land that God gave to Abraham.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Because of his trickery, Jacob was in fear of his brother so he decided to flee to his uncle Leban. This is where our passage picked up with his encounter with God. Jacob was on the run…away from his brother and also away from God because of his sinfulness. Jacob claimed something that was not belonged to him. He stole his brother’s birthright. **In spite of all of that,** **God extends God’s grace upon Jacob. God gave him a second chance to be redeemed in spite of his sinful past. God’s story of salvation is a story of grace and adoption!**

Friends, based on Jacob’s story of redemption, we know that **God is willing to give us a second chance by adopting us out of God’s grace and benevolence.** From a humanitarian’s point-of-view, no longer will we be like orphans feeling “unwanted” or unworthy of being loved by others. **God has embraced us, just as we are, as our heavenly parent!** From an economic point-of-view, even though we will NEVER be able to pay back the debt that we owe, our debts have been canceled or paid-in-full through Christ’s redemptive work on the cross for all of humanity.

**This “Adoption by Grace” opens up a new path for our salvation.** As God gave Jacob this promise that “*I am with you and will keep you where you go, and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”* [[4]](#footnote-4)

 So what does this mean for us today, now that we have been offered this **renewed sense of freedom that liberates us from the bondage of our human sins. It means that:**

* We are free to explore new possibilities and try new things. We are no longer bounded to conform to the **values of society** – what we should or shouldn’t do. What’s acceptable and what’s not? Our freedom in Christ allows us to explore and enjoy God freely this way.
* It means that we are no longer bounded by our own **self-perceived limitations** or our **tradition** – when we are easily influenced by what other people tell us that we are never good enough or incapable of doing certain things or when we fail to open ourselves up and trust the Spirit’s leading. We’ve failed to dream dreams while limiting our potentials and the abilities that God has entrusted in us with.

In one of the workshops that I recently attended at the *Big Tent* conference, the topic was about “Church Growth and Congregational Vitality”. The speaker pointed out that one of the key reasons why many of our churches who are not thriving and growing is because they’ve placed limitation upon themselves. They’ve failed to take on this new identity, their new role and freedom as enabled by the Spirit. Many of the churches are operating under the mantra of **“We’ve all done this before?” or “We have never done it this way?”** Many of our churches have been stuck with our long-held tradition of how we must do things while failing to exercise our creativity and imagination. This sounds depressing, doesn’t it?

 **Thankfully God knows and believes in us more than we know or believe in ourselves.** It gives God deep pain and sorrow whenever we undervalue God’s hope and potential within us. God sees us not only as the beneficiary of change but as the benefactor and influence upon others around us as well. God the Holy Spirit has pledged to stand alongside with us through each and every step of the way.

 Many of us also had the opportunity to visit some of the local churches in and around the city of St. Louis….**to be ambassadors and bridge builders** among our fellow Presbyterians and in our neighborhoods, wherever we may come from. We all got our works cut out for us.

I had the opportunity to visit one of the churches that is located about 5 miles from Ferguson, MO, the site of the 2014 racial tension between the police and the local community, following the shooting death of Michael Brown by several white police officers who were subsequently acquitted of any crime. We got to hear the story from a different perspective that was never publicly told across the media.

As Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, Middle-Eastern, Native American Presbyterians gathered to pray for the future of not only for the city of St. Louis, but for our country that is ever so divided and in dire need of a new hope and a new spirit of adoption of God’s grace.

We exchanged our personal views, perspectives, and committed ourselves for the on-going process of reconciliation and healing through our humility and repentance of sins. **This was our Jacob’s Ladder moment** as we collectively prayed for peace and reconciliation upon those who are in power and against the system of injustice in this world. We pray that God would ultimately send us healing and **set us FREE beyond our human suffrage and bondage**, **by taking away our human egos and personal pride**, while **overcoming hatred and bias with love** and **seeking peace instead of war**. As the ultimate liberator, God has set us free and rescued us from this bondage of slavery through our hope and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, **the Kingdom of God is here and is yet to come.** We still got our works cut out for us in this process of healing and adoption by grace. While we might have just gotten a taste of the “first fruit” of God’s kingdom, we still hunger for more. We look forward to a day when everyone from the East/West/North/South to be sitting at the same table together and participating in the heavenly feast that is set out before us by Christ, without our human partiality and judgement.

**There are still hungry “children” of God out there waiting to be fed, seeking a place to rest their head, just as Jacob did. They are longing to be adopted by His grace and embraced by His love. This is God’s Good News as well as God’s calling for us in order to carry out God’s mission here on earth! Thanks be to God.**

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Galatians 3:29* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Romans 8:24-25* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Genesis 28:3-4* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Genesis 28:15* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)