Thoughts on Adoption  
Ephesians 1:1-6  
Sermon 7-23-2017  

Adoption is a way of increasing a family. To date three of my children have been adopted, four of my nephews have joined their ranks, as have several more great nieces and nephews. Just about every congregation I have served had adopted children as part of the membership. A common question asked by most adoptive parents is one of belonging. Will their adopted children grow into a sense of belonging? Will they be able to move from their past and embrace a new present? In many cases the additional question raised has to do with how their biological children and the adoptees will adjust to each other's.

For my family that question was answered more than once throughout the years. We noticed that two of our sons went through a similar process over the years. For a good while after arriving in the Stinson household, Choch and Chay continued to use their original Cambodian surname, Ponlork. Slowly a pattern emerged. School papers, in their own handwriting began to say Ponlork-Stinson. At one point they began coming home saying simply Stinson. We had never asked them to switch names, yet they did. It was as if they were saying I am a part of the Stinson family. It was as if they knew adoption did not mean they were somehow not fully a part of the family. Sometime later, we noticed a change again. First Chay dropped the Stinson name and used his original name, Ponlork. Choch shortly followed suit. This too was okay. To us, it meant they were feeling comfortable enough to be a part of us even as they laid claim to their own individuality and uniqueness.

Their journey is instructive for me. I have always marveled at how they maneuvered the competing claims. Children of a different culture, through circumstances beyond their control, they were thrown into a strange environment and asked to cope. Learn a new language. Learn new eating habits. Learn new ways of doing things. Become part of a new family. Surely a tall order for two youngsters. I have often wondered how I would have navigated such seas of change.

There is an analogy to adoption to the Church, the Body of Christ. Members are called, as were Chay and Choch, to follow a new way. We are called, if you will, to learn a new language, new habits, a new sense of family. That does not happen all at once. It takes a lifetime to complete. God has called us to this new life, this new family. This family behaves differently than the one we were used to. Adoption into the family is a call to move to more a expansive sense of family, to a wider concept of sister and brother.
Recently I had what can only be called an encounter with someone who sees life quite differently than I do. For him, this is strictly a dog eat dog kind of a world. Everyone has to look out only for himself. He emanates very little joy. Everything is a struggle. Life offers struggles, no gifts. We were discussing (you might have guessed) the political situation of things today. His response to something I said was *Of course you say that. You have to. You are a minister.* Now, please understand, nothing gets me more riled than someone assuming I say and do what I do because I am a minister. That smacks too much of being unable or unwilling to think for myself. And so I snapped, *You have it backwards, I am a minister because I believe what I say and do.*

The conversation reinforces something we already know. Christians always have a choice to make. There are always competing claims.

In a time of language and behavior that would exclude large portions of the human family - Christians have to make a choice. Do we go along with the language and behavior or do we act as if we have joined another family?

In an era when racism and bigotry continue to rear their ugly heads - we have to make a choice. What do we know to be true? Are we called to a new, ever increasing family or not?

When patriotism and pride would tempt us to support inhumane policies, we have to make a choice. Is God, who we meet in Jesus, the head of the family or is someone else?

On every level of our lives, the question of what family holds our allegiance is there. As we think about that, are we willing to learn a new language, new habits, new behaviors?

We live in a world - perhaps we always have and always will - where the language and family of love - which always means a language of justice for everyone - is seen as a naive concept. There are always those around us who would seek to remind us that we have to forget about others and focus on ourselves. There are always those who would see all the Chays and Choch's of our world as not belonging.

We are called to counter those claims. We are called not only to adopt others into our circles of love, we are called to become adopted children of a God of endless
love, and to live as such in a strange land, using strange language, responding in strange ways. We are called to be the Church, the Body, and the family, of Christ.

The good news for those of us who will hear this is that God strengthens us to engage in this struggle. For those who are willing to hang in there, there is good news. We find it this morning in the letter to the Ephesians.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.* Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love, he destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the beloved.

The good news is that we can live with competing claims and remain faithful. We have the security of being able to step forward and say and do the loving, just, thing, because we have the security of being a family, the security of knowing we are not alone, the security of knowing we are loved.

The good news is that we belong to a very special family, and because we do, we can dare to be different. We have been adopted and can therefore live with different standards and values.

May we hear this good news and allow it to shape our lives.

Amen!