

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

July 11, 2021 – PENTECOST 7 / PROPER 10B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Chosen as God’s Own—from Before Time Began*”

Amos 7:7-15 (God calls a prophet to preach justice for wrongs done)  
Psalm 85:8-13 (Listen to God; His salvation is near, as are mercy and truth)  
Ephesians 1:3-14 (The Lord has adopted us, and made us His own)  
St. Mark 6:14-29 (John the Baptist is executed by King Herod)

---

How many of you like to play sports? (Show of hands) How many played on a team, when you were in school? (Show of hands) In gym class, did you ever have the humiliating experience of being chosen *last* for a team? I certainly did. What about when another child was having a birthday party, and you weren’t invited?

Or, in your adult life, that promotion you totally deserved, but were passed over for the boss’s less-qualified favorite? The girl you wanted to marry ... who ran off with someone else? The house you wanted to buy, but someone else beat you to it with an unmerited higher bid? The advancement you worked so hard for, but were told that because you were—fill in the blank—a woman; a person of color; a religious minority; someone with an undesirable political affiliation or an unorthodox lifestyle—the answer was “No.” Perhaps some of you found out you were adopted, and then struggled with the feeling of being unwanted by your birth parents.

Every one of us has experienced, to some extent, what it’s like not to be chosen, or to be outright rejected. But today’s Epistle lesson has some good news for us. (By the way, aren’t you relieved I’m not preaching on today’s gruesome gospel?).

Here, I’ll be reading selected verses in Ephesians 1:3-14 from Eugene Peterson’s “The Message,” translation:

“How blessed is God! Long before he laid down earth’s foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!).”

Before I go farther, I’d like us to focus on this one phrase: “Long before [God] laid down earth’s foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love.”

*Wow!* We can’t even *begin* to grasp that, what? a billion years ago—give or take a few eons—the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe *chose* each and every one of us (you and me!), to be part of His family, and took great pleasure in doing so.

St. Paul continues: “[God] thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth.”

So, at this point in your life, you might wonder what your purpose is, and whether all that has gone before has any significance or meaning. Take heart! Scripture is telling us that not only did God choose each and every one of us even before the world was created, but also He did this with a complete and long-range plan for each of our lives. And not just our individual existences, but God intended for us to be part of His plan for “everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth,” says St. Paul.

About now, you’re asking, “What do you mean by that?” Let’s continue on in Peterson’s translation of verses 11-12:

“It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, [God] had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.”

Our lives have purpose and meaning because we are part of God’s grand plan. But only through our relationship with Christ can we take part in that. We can attempt, under our own power, and using our own smarts, to change the world, increase our importance, or come up with some standard-shattering scheme. Unfortunately, those enterprises will ultimately fall short of perfection if we are not living in Jesus Christ, and allowing Him to live in and through us.

You’ve heard the advertising slogan, “Everything goes better with Coke”? In the case of our spiritual lives and our eternal destinies, “Everything goes better with Jesus!” St. Paul affirms this in verses 13-14: “It’s in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This down payment from God is the first installment on what’s coming, a reminder that we’ll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.”

Through belief in, trust in, and a relationship with Jesus Christ, we are “signed, sealed, and delivered” into God’s eternal presence and plan, by the Holy Spirit. You can think of the Holy Spirit as a heavenly Fed-Ex courier: He packages us up in Christ, then delivers us to God—for all time, and for every glorious thing our Lord planned for us from before He created the world! The New Living Translation of Ephesians 1:5 is: “[God’s] unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure.”

Finding out how our God has loved us beyond measure, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ—even though He is *intimately* acquainted with our petty pride, temptations and weaknesses, faults, and sins of both commission and omission—should do a lot to lift your sense of self in the past, present, and future. Even if you’re not *aware of* being part of some great plan of God’s, the Bible assures us that each believer is! We may not know what that plan is, or understand every part of it, until we see Jesus in heaven.

But to God, *every* life counts. *Every* life matters. The life of *every* follower of Christ is precious to our Lord beyond our capacity to comprehend.

Remember that, the next time you encounter and are tempted to snub someone you dislike, or would rather not talk to or socialize with. Remember that, the next time you utter (or even think of!) an unkind, judgmental word about a neighbor, co-worker, family member, or a fellow parishioner. Remember that, the next time you’re being baited into what will likely turn into a nasty political or religious argument.

God chose us to be His own, out of *love*, because God Himself is love. Therefore, we who belong to Him are called to love one everyone, as He has loved us. To forgive as Christ has forgiven us. To bring light and encouragement to others, as the Holy Spirit has guided and inspired us.

Those kids on the team didn’t want you? Your name wasn’t on that birthday party guest list? *Aah*, who cares? God had you in mind, loved you to infinity and back, and chose you to be His own, before this planet you’re living on was every created. Now THAT is awesome good news, and healing balm to our souls.

So let us go forth in joy! *Amen*.