



Who Do You Think You Are
Ephesians 1:3-14

1st in the sermon series on Ephesians

Sunday, July 15th, 2018 ~ 9th Sunday after Pentecost, 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel

Text: 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 God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before God in love. (vss. 3 & 4)

Who Do You Think You Are is one of those British imports that American audiences fall in love with. It's not a Downton Abbey-like import, but an America's Got Talent-like import. Each week a well known personality is taken on a genealogical quest of who they are. In America the subjects have included football player Emmitt Smith, film producer Spike Lee, actors Jon Cryer of "Two and a Half Men", Hillary Duff, and Brooke Shields, to name only a few. Sometimes family lore is debunked, secrets revealed, suspicions confirmed as well as tears, laughter, pride and a better understanding of who they really are.

We are a genetic composite of our ancestors who preceded us. Have you ever said something to your children and then thought to yourself, "Oooh, that sounds just like my dad" or "my mother"? Have you ever looked in the mirror and seen the shadow of your mother or father staring back at you? Have you looked at old family pictures and have someone say that you look just like a grandfather or grandmother, an aunt or an uncle?

Counselors trained in "family systems" will tell you that certain behavioral patterns replicate themselves in subsequent generations; alcoholism, divorce, or a propensity to a certain illness. Someone I know decided to go to counseling because they wanted to work on their marriage end "the pattern of divorce" while their children were still young. They wanted to set a new example and establish a "new normal".

One of the woes that academics have is the increasing number of Americans who simply don't know and don't care about our own country's history. British orator, philosopher and legislator, Edmund Burke once said that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it.

It can be difficult and painful to come face to face with our history, our family tree. We may see a rotten apple or two and even be surprised at seeing an apricot on the ol' family apple tree. And, it is easy to forget "whose" we are, especially when we don't know who we are. Jesus once told a parable about this. It is commonly called the parable of the prodigal son but, as Timothy Keller wrote in his book by the same name, it's really about a "prodigal father" who was extravagant in his grace.

Over the next few weeks we are going to systematically walk through the New Testament letter to the Ephesians. We will begin by exploring the question, “Who do you think you are?”

Because of a variety of internal factors, most biblical scholars believe that this letter was written after the death of the apostle Paul by one of Paul’s premier students. The writer encapsulated the great apostle’s teaching in what would become a circular letter.

The letter begins with the customary salutation before reminding us who we are. We are Chosen, Holy and Blameless. I invited you to look at those three words with me.

Chosen.

You are not an accident. We are not an accident. This congregation is not an accident. We are Chosen; we are chosen before the foundation of the world. In the words of the old hymn,

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew, he moved my soul to seek him seeking me; it was not I that found O Savior true, no, I was found of thee.

In his farewell discourse found in the gospel of John Jesus told his disciples, You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit. (16:15) Jesus calls us in the tumult of life’s wild seas not for positions of privilege but for service in God’s Eternal Kingdom. God has work for us to do. And God has given us the equipment for our work of repairers of the breach and setting right the brokenness of the world. To do this, we have been infused with holiness.

Holiness.

In the First Letter of Peter the writer said that the Christian community and individuals of that community are to (and I quote): “prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves ... like obedient children do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had. ... Instead, as the One who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct, as it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy. (1: 13-16, selected)

To be holy is to be different. The Early Church, the first century Church never doubted that it had to be different from the culture in which it found itself. That is why they were persecuted.

Danish philosopher once Soren Kierkegaard once shared a parable called “Tame Geese”. In this parable he describes a barnyard where a flock of geese lived. Each Sunday they would waddle out of their houses and waddle down the main street to their church. They would waddle to their pew in a grand cathedral. There would be a geese choir that would sing beautifully before a goose pastor would read from the geese bible. The goose minister would do some version of the same message every week.

“My fellow geese, God has given you wings! With these wings you can fly! With these wings you can soar like eagles! No walls can confine you, no fences can hold you. You have wings and you can fly like the birds God created you to be!”

The geese would nod and quack - do geese quack? - their approval before waddling home. Some became Christmas dinner. Some were sold. But none ever flew.

The biggest criticism of the modern Church is that for too long it has been indistinguishable from the world in which it exists. The Church has essentially said that we will not expect too much from you. We will not challenge you too much or make you too uncomfortable. All you have to do in exchange is to live a relatively good, decent and respectable life.

As a consequence the Church has become socially acceptable - or at least tolerated - Europe and North America. But, over time, as too many churches became a nice place to go, on a nice Sunday morning, where a person could sit in a nice comfortable worship space, hear a nice talk before going to a nice lunch, and return to a nice home, to send children to nice schools and go to a nice job, the church has become more and more politicized and increasingly irrelevant. You see, the problem with nice is that it is boring and easily manipulated.

Jesus Christ did not call his disciples out of the world but into the world. He called those who would take him seriously to make a difference within the world. Christ didn't call for "Christian" doctors, nurses, lawyers, counselors, business leaders, workers, homemakers, child care workers, employers, or whatever. Rather he called for doctors to be Christian, employers to be Christian, lawyers to be Christian and so on. It may sound subtle but there is a world of difference. You see, what Jesus calls for, what he demands is for his followers to make, what one author called, "The Monday Connection"; to live what they profess on Sunday Monday through Saturday, each and every day of their life. Jesus knew that if those who call him Lord could only make "the Monday Connection" that they would revolutionize the world.

A brief word on Blameless.

Blameless is a sacrificial word in Scripture. An animal offered for sacrifice would have to first be inspected to certify that it was without blemish - blameless. In places in this world where child sacrifice is still practiced by witch doctors - I saw this in Uganda - parents will intentionally scar their child to reduce the risk of kidnapping for these rituals.

In Ephesians when the writer said us that we are both holy and blameless he was saying that we need to offer the whole of our lives in service to God. And service to God is not a call to "professional ministry". It is a call to ministry in whatever profession or station you find yourself.

So, who do you think you are? Who do you think First Federated Church is? Well, I'll tell you the answer revealed in the baptismal font; you - we - are chosen before the foundation of the world to be both holy and blameless. We are called to embrace this gift called Life and to live it to the glory of God all of our days whether they be long or brief.

Amen.