

The Chosen Ones

Eph 1:3-14

Rev J Shannon

To be Jewish, your mother has to have been Jewish and her mother before her...then there is no getting out of it. It is in the blood. They take heritage very seriously and even today Israel has heritage laws as to who can marry whom and what legal status you have when Jew, non-Jew or 1/2 Jew.

My mother told me Judaism was a religion like any other – not a race. In Israel, I was told the opposite. When they come to get you, they said, it won't matter what your religion is. And they were right in that many practicing Jewish Catholics were rounded up. The Chosen people. Chosen by God. Chosen by government.

So what does it mean at Jesus' Baptism and later on the mountain when the voice from heaven proclaimed, (and I paraphrase) 'this is my son, beloved, and I am well pleased' ???– he was already Jewish, already blessed.

There is a key to this in the Ephesians passage today. Read carefully:

⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption **through his blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.

We are adopted and anointed through Jesus. There is no place for pride or arrogance. We are not called because we are special. We are called by grace.

But it is a little more complicated than that. The church is not a voluntary association of people who think it might be interesting to follow Jesus. That's a Sunday club. The church is a collective of people who are called to God. Many still don't understand why but the one thing we share is we know God has given us a sense, a hint, a thing we've known deep down all along; that we have some role to play in God's plan. We are compelled – not called. And that shapes our lives and discipleship.

Oh yes, there is invitation. The door is open and we, as a church, and God in wisdom, display a myriad of opportunities, bidding and encouraging but the response comes, when it comes, from deep within us. We are called – out of the dark, out of ourselves into something much bigger: To gather all things to

Him. One by one we are called into the reconciliation of all things – God’s work.

And never was there such a time as this.

2021 was a year where we began to see social cohesion disintegrate. It began with the 6 Jan riots in Washington which we all watched in horror. You, like me, cannot imagine that even happening. A mob taking over Congress and trying to declare the government as illegitimate. It was so unimaginable, that we could imagine it happening here. We watched on TV as the horror film played over and over with more detail and to be honest, as a person who spent ½ my life working and teaching government – it was my 9/11.

I knew in that moment, the world had changed and would never be the same again. We had been watching and sensing the unravelling for some time but that was the visual slap in the face that told me it was real. Social cohesion fractured – and later in the year reinforced by the anti-vax demonstrations that made no sense. And Thursday, the news came through that ‘protestors’ had set the Old Parliament House on fire – the Museum of Democracy. The demon is at the door.

You probably know I have had an interest in ethics and social reform for a long time. I am lucky enough to be a Fellow of the St James Ethics Centre¹ and a member of the Hastings Centre. The Hastings Centre is a bio-ethics research institute. The centre did research on the ethics of compulsory vaccination and equitable access to vaccinations. It advised the US government. They are doing research on “the reconstruction of common purpose”. The latest report looks at ‘civic learning’ and how that impacts on collective problem-solving.

We, in a less rarefied way, grappled with our own ethical issues. Our Church Council wrestled with whether we would open to the unvaccinated during the last round of restrictions, or close to all? But as a church, a people called, we approached it in a very different way that those on the streets of Washington or Melbourne. We listened to each other – and we listened to God. I’d say, we’re not too bad at collective problem-solving.

And it is that we can offer. To be a Christian, is not a card-carrying membership or a blood relative. It is to **BE** different in the world *because* we are called by grace. Our redemption (stroke salvation) is in the doing, not in the deserving.

¹ Now known as The Ethics Centre

That makes this passage counter-intuitive, especially for those people (and churches) who champion the individual. American Pentecostalism is based on a strange mix of faith in two Gods – the Christian God and the god of free markets. These beliefs are intertwined into what is now called ‘prosperity gospel’. But this passage starts by making it clear, that we are utterly dependent on God. It is not us. God creates; God destines; God wills; God reveals and God has his/her own plan. That means humans, as individuals, accomplish nothing as the plan is collective. It is *with* God.

The next challenging part of the reading is that we are obliged to praise God, It’s our duty (and to me our joy). BUT despite our obligation – it is not transactional. We will glorify God and enjoy him/her forever – but that is not the passcode to redemption. It is aside from it because we are judged on our doing and our being – and not necessarily as individuals.

The true and proper response to the grace of being called is humility and faithful, gentle witness to what we believe.

The Sapphire Coast congregation does not set out to change the world but in kindness, with your Christmas boxes, in your donations and by your support to God’s work in the world – you are fulfilling a small part in God’s plan for reconciliation.

For 2022, I asked you to have enough gutsy imagination to imagine the world we can live in, with all the mess and disruption. A world that still brings joy and peace, that celebrates God and fulfils our calling to be and act and think as adopted children, chosen by God and compelled to His service.

That is my prayer.

John O’Donoghue said

May the blessings released through your hands
Cause windows to be opened in darkened minds.

May the sufferings your calling brings
Be but winter before the spring.

May the companionship of your doubt
Restore what your beliefs leave out.

May the secret hungers of your heart

Harvest from emptiness its sacred fruit.

May your solitude be a voyage
Into the wilderness and wonder of God.

May your words have the prophetic edge
To enable the heart to hear itself.

May the silence where your calling dwells
Foster your freedom in all you do and feel.

May you find words full of divine warmth
To clothe the dying in the language of dawn.

May the slow light of the Eucharist
Be a sure shelter around your future.

As the wise men departed to tell the world what they witnessed – I pray that
each week in 2022, you will leave this place to tell others what you've heard
and felt.

Amen