

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
By the Rev. Dr. John S. Niles

“You Are Chosen” Series 2

*Sermon Series: Who Do You Think You Are?
Finding Your True Identity in Christ.*

Ephesians 1:1-18
January 23, 2022

A few years ago I enjoyed a conversation over lunch with former Conservative Ontario Premier Bill Davis. During the conversation we discussed the ills of the world and the economy as well as the church. I was pleasantly surprised that he was an active member of the Grace United Church in Brampton. We discussed the challenges that his church is facing and told him about the church I was serving at the time. He said that he had wished I was at his church so they could also look forward to the future with optimism. After which, I did have to apologize to him. He asked me “Why”, I said, “It is because I was called to your church at the same time as the church I had then be serving. And I chose that one instead of yours.” I assured him that God hasn’t forsaken them yet. To which he said, “I’m not sure about that. Our minister is an NDPer”.

We began last week to explore the book of Ephesians in this series called “Who do you think you are: Finding your true identity in Christ” It is my sincere hope that as we study the book of Ephesians you will catch a glimpse of God’s love for you. For *“He Chose you before the foundation of the world... and predestined you through adoption in Christ Jesus...to be sons and daughters of God...”*

One of the painful realities of life is that many people go through life with feelings of being forsaken, abandoned, and alone. They think that they are not worthy of acceptance, love or belonging. And yet, the profound message of Ephesians is that you are not abandoned or forsaken; you belong, for God chose YOU!

Do you remember that moment in Harry Potter during - what was called the sorting ceremony - when the children were to be chosen for the different school houses. And the shouts and cheers came when Harry and the others were chosen for each school house and then were welcomed to their table. It mirrored the terrible moment in gym – you remember - when every one of my and earlier generations had to line up and two people were told to pick from the children lined up for their teams. And the relief and joy when you were chosen early and for the side you wanted to play on. And the terrible experience when someone was chosen last.

Being chosen is important! It always has been. The message of Ephesians is that you were chosen before anything was even made, *“He chose you before the foundation of the world... and predestined you through adoption in Christ Jesus...to be sons and daughters of God...”* You were that important to God.

I

You are chosen and so are more **privilege then you know**. For you belong and you are the beneficiary of an inheritance in Christ.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The story is told of a lawyer who hired a detective agency to locate a missing heir, who had just inherited 120 million dollars. The head of the agency told the lawyer, "I've put our best detective on the case. She's young, she's smart and she's ambitious. She'll find your missing heir if anyone can."

A few weeks later, the lawyer received a call from the female detective. She said, "I've got good news, I've found your missing heir." The lawyer said, "That's great, where is he?" She said, "Oh, he's right here, with me at the hotel. We'll see you just as soon as we get back from our honeymoon."

You belong and you are a beneficiary of every spiritual blessing in Christ. Belonging is different than just showing up or signing up or transferring a membership. It is much more than that. That is why people will do all sorts of thing in order to fit in and in order to belong; because they want to belong.

One of my daughters when she was a teenager once asked me if she could get her nose pierced. I said no. Jersey Cows have rings in their nose not people. Not long after my daughter asked me that, we were in the mall and there were a number of young people covered in piercings. They had dozens of piercings in each ear and nose and lips and other areas.

Now, these kids asked since they saw my clergy collar, "Do you think Jesus would accept us? I said, 'Of course he would, he was pierced too.'" They said, "What?" "Yes, he had a pierced side, and pierced hands and pierced feet." "And he was pierced out of love for you." They laughed, but they got the point.

I thought I did pretty well. At moments like that you don't want your daughter around. She said, "Daddy, does that mean I can get my nose pierced?" "NOOO!" I exclaimed. "But you said, that Jesus would accept me if I did and He had them after all." "Yes, he did. He was pierced for our iniquity not as a fashion statement."

Did you know that insanity is inherited? You get it from your kids. Which explains a great deal about me; for I have 6 Kids.

Being Chosen means you don't have to fit in. You don't have to conform to belong. You already do belong because you have been chosen. You can just be – be yourself – the self that God created you to be. Because you already belong!

II

You are chosen which means that you are more privileged then you know and also, that there is a **price to be paid**. ...*“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. ⁷In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace...”*

“Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once, was lost but now am found was blind but now I see.”

Ephesus was great city of 250,000 people. Tens of thousands of people come each year to offer sacrifices to the gods in the largest temple in the area – spilling the blood of lambs, and goats, pigeons, chickens and cows in an attempt to appease the gods or to plead with the gods for good weather, crops or something else. Blood sacrifice was normal for them; but it isn't for us and so we – in the western world have a hard time wrapping our head around why Christ had to pay a price for our redemption.

Now the truth is, that a price is always paid but not always by everyone. Notice first our police officers and their families, who pay a heavy price to keep the peace and freedoms that we enjoy every day and we owe them a great debt that we can't pay. Yet it is paid.

Notice also that the peace and prosperity we have enjoyed in Canada were paid for by others. For freedom isn't free. The freedom of assembly, the freedom of worship, the freedom to vote, the freedom of speech all came at a price paid for in the World Wars of the past and the wars of the present in order that freedom and democracy was maintained for the future.

And yet, in the news those very freedoms are in jeopardy for those in the Ukraine who may be faced with having to pay that terrible cost to keep their freedoms as Russia threatens to invade at their borders. A price is always paid by someone.

On a greater and broader and eternal way we see God has done that for us in Christ. *7In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace...*

III

You are chosen which means that you are more privileged than you know and also, price to be paid and that **you have more provisions than you know**. *To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. 7In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; 8Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence...*

Human strength is often overstated. Some may appear stronger with the power and advantage of resources, relationships and reasoning at their disposal. The truth is we are no stronger than our muscle fiber and physical conditioning. However, true strength and maximum strength is not found in one's physique, personality or position in life, but in God's power and provision. God's gift of strength is vertical and not horizontal – "through His Spirit," internal and not external – "in your inner being," permanent and not passing – "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." As believers in Christ, we have been given the provisions we need to deal with those issues we are facing.

In 1965 the Florida Gators football team was mediocre at best. Struggling in the heat and humidity of the deep south, the players were fighting a tougher opponent within themselves than they had ever fought on the gridiron – they had great difficulty finishing the game in champion-like form because they were dehydrated. So a team of University doctors developed a carbohydrate-electrolyte beverage that kept the team properly nourished throughout the game. Before the eyes of thousands of fans, the team's second half performance improved and in 1967 won the Orange Bowl. As you may know this beverage is on every sideline around the globe keeping athletes performing at their best. Of course, this beverage is known as Gatorade.

Now you might be asking yourself, what does Gatorade have to do with living out my faith in Christ? The answer is simple. You see, Gatorade gave the Florida Gators an edge over their opponents – they had the advantage. As believers in Christ, we go onto the field of play with the power and provisions of the Holy Spirit filling us. You were chosen before the foundation of the world...*To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.* ⁷*In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;* ⁸*Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence...*”

IV

You are chosen which means that you are privileged, there is a price, and have we have more provisions finally, you have been chosen **with a purpose in mind**. That is why Paul wants us to know. *“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.”*

When you come to comprehend that you have been chosen with a purpose – to live a life for the praise of his glory, it changes everything.

Fred Craddock, is a preacher who recently retired from teaching at Candler School of Theology. He told once of going back one summer to Gatlinburg, Tennessee to take a short vacation with his wife. One night they found a quiet little restaurant where they looked forward to a private meal.

While they were waiting for their meal they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting the guests. Craddock whispered to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here." He didn't want the man to intrude on their privacy. But the man did come by their table. He said, "Where you folks from?" They said, "Oklahoma." "Splendid state, I hear, although I've never been there. What do you do for a living?"

"I teach homiletics at the graduate seminary of Phillips University." "Oh, so you teach preachers, do you? Well, I've got a story I want to tell you." And with that he pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with Craddock and his wife.

Dr. Craddock said he groaned inwardly. Oh no, here comes another preacher story. It seems everyone has one.

The man stuck out his hand. "I'm Ben Hooper. I was born not far from here across the mountains. My mother wasn't married when I was born so I had a hard time. When I started to school, my classmates had a name for me, and it wasn't a very nice name. I used to go off by myself at recess and during lunch time because the taunts of my classmates cut so deeply. "What was worse was going downtown on Saturday afternoon and feeling every eye burning a hole through me. They were all wondering just who my real father was.

"When I was about 12 years old a new preacher came to our church. I would always go in late and slip out early. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast I got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in church on me. Just about the time I got to the door I felt a big hand on my shoulder. I looked up and the preacher was looking at me. "Who are you, son? Whose boy are you?" "I felt the old

weight come on me. It was like a big, black cloud. Even the preacher was putting me down. "But as he looked down at me, studying my face, he began to smile a big smile of recognition. "'Wait a minute,' he said, 'I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You're a son of God.'" "With that he slapped me on the back and said, 'Young man you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.'"

The old man looked across the table at Fred Craddock and said, "That was the most important single sentence ever said to me." With that he smiled, shook the hands of Craddock and his wife, and moved on to another table to greet old friends.

Suddenly, Fred Craddock remembered. On two occasions the people of Tennessee had elected as a governor who was born without a father. His name was Ben Hooper.

Nelson Mandela understood this. He said

Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate,
but that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us.
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant,
gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world...

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It is not just in some; it is in everyone.

And, as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give
other people permission to do the same...

Listen, you have been born to manifest God's glory on the earth! You think about that. Amen.