

Jon Hauerwas – October 21, 2018 – “Marked” Ephesians 1:3-6, 13-14 and Ephesians 1:15-23

Typically, over 130,000 children are legally adopted in the United States each year. They are step-children, children in the foster care system, those who are voluntarily surrendered at birth, and children from other countries. ¹ As I reflect on this topic, I am reminded not only of the children, but also of the parents. What do you suppose motivates someone to adopt a child who is not biologically their own? To spend, perhaps, tens of thousands of dollars on the legal processes and fees in addition to the continued care of the child. Theirs is, of course, a huge, life-altering commitment. And for this reason, I have often viewed adoptive parents with great respect and admiration. While I do not dispute that children are capable of bringing great joy to the lives of their parents, it seems to me that the decision to adopt is still a selfless call to nurture, to protect, and to provide.

For its part, the Bible is full of stories about how God blesses those on the margins – the widows, the orphans, the poor. The entirety of the biblical message asserts that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Time and time again, we

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/pov/offandrunning/fact-sheet/>

hear the narrative of chosenness and how God is at work in the process of divine election.

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, we find the Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt. But, even in the midst of slavery, they continue to prosper. Their numbers grow and grow to the point that the pharaoh feels threatened. And then, in his fear, he devises a plot to kill the newborn children.

This provides the background for chapter 2, which begins in this way: “a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.”

Next, “the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. ‘This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,’ she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, ‘Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women

to nurse the child for you?’ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Yes.’ So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.’ So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, ‘because’, she said, ‘I drew him out of the water.’”

Friends, when a woman is preparing for labor, she knows that the time is drawing near when her so-called “water” breaks. Next, at the time of birth, a child is said to be delivered from out of the womb, from the midst of those waters, in order that the child might take his or her first, independent breath. It is truly incredible to witness such an event.

In the case of Moses, he was originally born through the natural process of leaving his mother’s womb. And later, he was born again when he was lifted up from the waters of the Nile River and adopted by the pharaoh’s daughter. In the church, we speak about a similar process. Having first been born of flesh and blood, we enter the waters of baptism from which we are drawn up and raised to new life in Christ.

Mark highlights this formative experience in the very first chapter of his Gospel, writing, “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”

At the time of Jesus’ baptism, God says, “you are my son.” Biologically, we already know that Jesus was born of Mary. But, this is his second birth, at which time Jesus’ adoption is officially proclaimed and made known fully to him. From this point forward, there can be no mistaking it: God has chosen Jesus. God has claimed him, marked him, and set him apart to bring good news to all of the world.

Jesus was chosen to reflect God’s intentions for all of humankind. Or, to borrow a line from one of my professors, “election is the expression of God’s will to create a community that serves and glorifies God. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel are the object of election (Lev. 26:12); in the New Testament, the object of election is Jesus Christ and all who are united with him.”²

² Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, Second Edition*. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), Pg. 89-90.

My parents always intended to have only two children. In 1974, my mother gave birth to their first – a boy whom they named Jeff. Then, less than two years later, she gave birth to their second child – a girl whom they named Jennifer. And just when my parents believed that their family was complete, tragedy struck. That little girl, just one week old, died of congestive heart failure. My parents were understandably devastated, and several years passed before they were willing to try again. Six years after my brother, and four years following the birth of that little girl, I was welcomed into the family.

Practically speaking, I am not supposed to be here because I was never a part of the original plan. Remember, my parents wanted only two children – and I was the third. But God, as we all know well, has the capacity to work in some very mysterious ways. And so I believe that, in some sense of the phrase, my baby sister laid down her life for me. And I see in my own family narrative the message of Jesus through whom we are all adopted into the heavenly kingdom. May it be so and all thanks be to God both now and forever. Amen.