

**A SERMON GIVEN BY STUDENT PASTOR PATRICK LEWIS
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Sunday, June 20, 2010

Title: An Adopted Life – A Father’s Story

Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-6, Romans 8:14-19

Before I begin, I would like to say thank you to all of you. When my wife and I came here, we joined this church as our church family, and family you have been, and I am sincerely thankful for this family.

Now I am not in any way an expert. Although I have reared two girls to the age of twenty-six and am still a friend to them, I can tell you that this time around I know no more than I did before and everything is different. And, I have three boys that might tell you different. But, I will not be passing out advice on what it is to be a parent. I will also not be focusing on fathers. Father’s day is a day that Hallmark came up with to sell cards; instead I would like to talk about families and adoption.

What is a parent? I looked it up in the dictionary and it gave some dry answers, so I asked around and found that a parent is someone that is a guide, a role model, a friend, a caretaker, and one who loves unconditionally. That is apparently the most difficult part, the unconditional part.

How do they do it? How do parents fit it all in: work, church, family, school, doctors, food, education, keeping things and kids clean, and play? I’m a parent and I don’t know how it all gets done; it just does.

Why do parents do it? I have been asked this question too and I don’t know why. I know that my wife and I couldn’t have children, so we felt adoption was the way to go for us. I suppose we did it as much for selfish reasons as for the reasons that help children and our society, but when it all boils down... I really don’t know why we do it.

What I do know is that there were over 51,000 children who received care from the foster care system in 2008. Today, 20,000 children are in foster care and group homes, and 320 children are available for adoption. Who loves these children? God does. Jesus said, “Let the children come to me.” [Mark 10:13]

Who are these children? Well, that is the daunting part. As we began looking at fostering children, we were presented Tony... “Tony sets cats on fire, but he’s getting better!” Our first thoughts were, “This is going to be interesting.” Three children were moved into protective custody at the shelter that Kim, my wife, worked with, two boys and a girl. We soon learned that it was really three boys. Noah, the youngest had been raised as a girl and nobody knew otherwise until the emergency nurse examined him. They were good boys. Oh, Stephan tattled a lot, you see it was his job to watch Mikey go dumpster diving for food, and if they didn’t have enough, Stephan would tell on Mikey and he would have to go back out for more food. Noah liked pink; he even wrestled his cousin Madison for her Barbie bike at Christmas time. That worked out well because Madison liked the Spiderman bike just fine. Then there was Danny and Lita, four-year-old twins who came with a lot of baggage. Lita was diagnosed schizophrenic, psychotic, and required maximum dosages of medications and multiple doctor visits daily. She couldn’t go to a public restroom because she had been molested in one at the age of three, and she had trouble with crowds, so our trip to Disneyland was more than memorable! Danny was a piece of cake. You could set him on the couch and turn on the television and he would sit there motionless for hours. We found out later that it was a form of epilepsy and he was actually in a

seizure. That coupled with his mild autism, made him a pleasant boy, but he too required occupational and physical therapy several days each week.

Today we look at our boys and they too have their challenges...

Joe can sit at a table for hours just admiring and savoring his food. I guess every meal is an experience when you have missed so many in your tiny little lifetime. Isaiah can be aggressive with other kids, which likely comes from his second foster home where he competed with teenagers that were in gangs, or maybe from their fourth placement where he was one of twelve children that were mostly unsupervised and he would have to compete for attention and food. Zach, outside of his fear of water, which he seems to have beaten, he is just a typical kid. There don't seem to be any mental scars from the near drowning that put all three in foster care just over two years ago. Our three have been adopted into a family, to parents that guide them, that are role models, who are friends and caretakers and who love unconditionally. We aren't perfect, but we are a family.

Today's readings talk about adoption, but the apostle Paul was talking about the adoption of the Gentiles into the family of God. So who were the Gentiles? They were everybody except the Jews. Paul believed that the Jews were bound to a covenant with God through Jewish law, but the Gentiles could be accepted into God's grace through the new covenant bound by Christ's sacrifice. From this sacrifice, God would accept all who were freed from the bonds of sin by Christ's sacrifice for all. God would adopt us into the family of the Creator. What did Paul know of adoption? As a Pharisee, Paul would know very vividly the story of Moses... and Moses was adopted, as was Jesus. We don't think of it that way, but Joseph adopted Jesus as his own son. What is a parent? A parent is a role model, a friend, a caretaker, and one who loves unconditionally.

I don't know when I actually first met Owen but my first recollection of him was upon his return from Viet Nam and his first tour of duty as a medivac. Owen was one of those kids who was more than a handful, and when he got in enough trouble, the judge offered him a choice, he could go to jail or he could enlist. When Owen came back, he was changed. He couldn't keep out of trouble and didn't seem to fit in. He reenlisted at least four times that I know of, each time he would get out; he would get off the boat, get into trouble, and reenlist just in time to keep out of jail. I remember one such jaunt when I was about 14. Owen shipped in to New York and bounced checks all the way across the country until he got to San Diego where he joined the Army. I didn't realize how much trouble he was in until the FBI came knocking at our door. Who would love Owen unconditionally? Five women couldn't... they all married him and divorced him.

One year while Owen was stationed in Germany, he got on his motorcycle and left for work. On the way there, he was hit by a dump truck. He broke his arms and legs, his ribs, his back and his neck. They told him he would never walk again, but Owen wouldn't listen to that. Within a year, he was upright and in a wheelchair, another year passed and he was walking with crutches and later just a cane. But, the pain had taken its toll and Owen was addicted to medications and alcohol.

Who could love Owen unconditionally? We could, his family, his mother loved him until the day she died... and we loved him until the day he died. And God loved him, unconditionally.

It's like it says in Luke, "Simon, do you see this woman?" [Luke 7] God sees us as we are. As we remember from the story of the prodigal son... Children take everything they can before they leave home; they run away and waste it all living a life of decadence. They spend and waste everything and don't realize until the day they are feeding the pigs, thinking that they would give it all for the food the pigs are eating. Upon realizing that they have nowhere

else to turn, they choose to go home, knowing that they have been wrong and wondering if they can ever be accepted back. But the father sees the son from across the field and goes running to him... just as God does with us, loving us unconditionally.

“For the son of man came to seek and save what is lost.” [Luke 19]

At some time don't we all feel lost and alone in this world? Who will guide us, be our friend and our role model, and love us unconditionally? God does because we are adopted into this family.

As we walk from this place, know there is hope for those who are alone, who are troubled, and who need a hand. There is hope. And there is a place for them in this family. Amen.