

## CHILDREN OF DESTINY

Pentecost 7 Year B

Jer. 31:7-14 ; Ps. 147:12-20; Eph. 1:3-14; Jn. 1:(1-9) 10-18

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The French writer Andre Maurois once made the statement: “The universe is indifferent. Who created it? Why are we here on this puny mud-heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I am quite convinced that no one has the least idea.”

There are many people in today’s world that would agree with him. For many people, life *is* meaningless—a succession of open-ended, random events. There is no purpose—no underlying goal for human history. For them, life is only what you make of it. God is left out of the equation—and what spirituality there is, is often characterised by either a Sunday-school misunderstanding of the gospel or an assorted concoction of eastern mysticism. The trouble is, when you leave God out, life is *indeed* random. And it’s this kind of philosophy that can lead a person to despair.

If there is no rhyme or reason in this universe, then our lives as individuals *are* essentially meaningless. This accounts for the popular philosophy of: “You only live once so you had better make the most of it. Get out of it what you can. If it feels good, do it.” With that kind of outlook on life, it’s no wonder so many people are depressed. You see, if you do not believe in a life that has meaning and purpose, there *is* an unconscious despair. The search for significance that is carried on by all of us ends up being frustrated. And we are left feeling empty.

Throughout our existence we struggle to give meaning to our lives—in our school—in our work—in our families—and in our wider experiences of life. We all desperately want our life to mean something—to have a goal—to have something to which we can aspire—not just to make us feel good in ourselves, but so that we might make a significant contribution to the world in which we live. Certainly there *are* people in this world who only want to ‘take’—and we hear about them often—but not everyone is out to ‘take’, many people want to ‘give’ and give significantly and abundantly.

It is to this kind of philosophy and to these kinds of life experiences that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians speaks.

In the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us that the entry of Jesus Christ into the universe and into human history was not some last minute decision. We do not celebrate Christmas as God's response to a world gone wrong or the restoration of a paradise lost through our own rebellion. It was God acting out of his perfect will and foreknowledge—out of love for his creation. Long before the foundation of the world—before any of the material world in which you and I live, ever came into being—God determined that you and I would need a Saviour. Paul says that it's been a part of God's plan, right from the beginning. It was predestined—it had to happen—and it had to happen because of God's love for us.

Without any action of our own, and long before you and I even came to be, God destined us to be adopted as sons and daughters through his Son Jesus Christ, if we place our faith in him.

In other words, creation *does* have a purpose—life *does* have meaning—and that meaning is somehow bound up in God's abundant love for us.

This is a love that God freely offers us in his gift of redemption, as Paul says, "...for forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."

Ernest Hemingway wrote a story about a father and his teenage son. In the story, the relationship had become somewhat strained, and the teenage son ran away from home. His father began a journey in search of that rebellious son.

Finally, in Madrid, Spain, in a last desperate attempt to find the boy, the father put an ad in the local newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, Meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." The next day, in front of the newspaper office, eight hundred Pacos showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness. (George Munzing, *Living a Life of Integrity*)

Just as a soured relationship between a father and a son can be restored when there is forgiveness, so forgiveness is God's way of restoring our relationship with God, so that we might enjoy the privileges of being God's adopted children.

The gift of God's love and forgiveness is a costly gift, yet it is free to us. And although we may often feel unworthy we are still loved and forgiven. We are not the church because we have performed well. We are not the church because we are respectable citizens. We are the church because we freely accept the grace of God and are free to pass it on to others.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with a message about God's grace. It's a message, not about what we do but about what God does. Certainly there's a place for repentance, but God does not love us because we repent of our sin. We repent of our sin because God loves us.

That's what it means to live in God's love, to embrace it, to both glorify and enjoy God forever. Living lives that reflect God's love for us is one of the ways we glorify, enjoy, and bless God.

All of us are children of destiny—destined for adoption—destined for redemption through the forgiveness of our sins—destined according to his purpose—destined for an inheritance, and marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. All, to the praise of his glory.

We are not a club. We are not a business. We are a community of believers who share one common cause and hope. We are all redeemed and "destined in God's love." We are a gathering of people who are all different. We are people who at sometime or another "have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." But, the glue that holds us together is God's love and forgiveness.

Soren Kierkegaard, a great teacher in the Church, told a parable of a community of ducks waddling off to duck church to hear the duck preacher. The duck preacher speaks eloquently and passionately about how God has given the ducks a special gift: wings with which to fly. With these wings, the duck preacher assures them, there is nowhere the ducks cannot go; there is no God-given task the ducks cannot accomplish. With those wings they can soar into the very presence of God. Shouts of "Amen!" are quacked throughout the duck congregation and wings are lifted in praise. And, then, at the conclusion of the service, the ducks leave the gathering place, commenting on what a wonderful message they have heard, and they quietly

waddle their way back home. (*Ecunet - Sermonshop 2000 07 16, Note #24 from Prowles.*)

At Christmas time we give and receive gifts as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. You and I are gifts from God. Each and every day we receive *more* gifts from God—forgiveness, strength, courage and hope. We also receive God’s promise to be with us through whatever the future holds—through joys and sorrows, challenges and successes. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

What are we going to do about these blessings that God has given to us? Are we going to sit here basking in their glow? Are we going to be like the ducks that receive the good news with awe and wonder and then waddle out into the world as if nothing has changed? Or are we going to fly—to take hold of God’s grace and forgiveness—God’s promise to us—his promise of adoption—his promise of forgiveness—his promise of a spiritual inheritance—and soar to new heights in our own love and graciousness towards God and one another?

We are indeed children of destiny—a destiny in which our lives have a reason and a purpose—a purpose that we must live out—each and every day—in the ongoing journey of our lives in Christ—to the praise of his glory.

To him be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.