



**SUNNYVALE**

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

728 W. Fremont Avenue • Sunnyvale, CA 94087  
408.739.1892 • [www.svpc.us](http://www.svpc.us) • [info@svpc.us](mailto:info@svpc.us)

*From the Pulpit*

**Sermon ~ A Spirit of Adoption**

The Rev. Matt Gough ~ November 20, 2011

**Genesis 25:29-34**

*Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of red stew. His birthright! He is the first born son, the chief heir to all that Isaac has amassed. It's more than just the bulk of his father's land and livestock. Esau's grandfather, Abraham received the promise that his descendants would be God's people, the people of Israel. A promise and inheritance that was to be carried from generation to generation. Esau gave this up for a bowl of red stew. Thus Jacob, taking advantage of Esau's short sightedness and hunger, took Esau's place as the heir, of not only of the material wealth, but of the Promise, God's covenant.

Indeed, when remembering the promise it is now traced through Jacob. Esau chose to be an orphan, without a birthright, and sold out God's promise.

It's important to contemplate this before reading Romans. There is an Esau in all of us. We have grasped for the promises that will fill our immediate hungers and needs at the expense of our birthright. We are people created in the image of God. We are people created to be in Communion with God. We are people created to enjoy God and love God forever.

However, we are not content to trust God and grasp desperately at that which feeds our immediate hunger. In doing so we lost our inheritance. Now we are entitled to nothing which causes us to desperately try to build our own kingdoms. All of us, the 99% and the 1%, have lost what is most important All have lost their birthright, whether descendant from Esau or from Jacob, and have been set adrift as spiritual orphans.

Knowing this either through hard experience or trust of God's word makes what Paul expresses in Romans 8 all the more powerful and important. These are truly transforming words. Listen for the word of God:

***Romans 8:14-18***

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.*

God gives us a Spirit of adoption. Adoption means to choose to make something a part of who you are. It is not ownership. It is closer to marriage, as it is a joining, a full acceptance. Adoption is all or none.

This adoption does not pick apart to only take in what is acceptable and ignore or discard the rest. It takes in the delightful and the heart wrenching. The familiar and the foreign. The wanted and the feared. Adoption is a partnership where the adopter agrees to take in and take on all of what the adoptee comes in with.

This is what God does in Christ with us. Christ did not come with a Spirit of discrimination, taking only what was acceptable and rejecting the rest. In Christ, we are adopted with all of our harder and painful and pain causing attributes. Nothing is left out. Christ takes it all and suffers it, what causes us to suffer, Christ suffers and where we cause suffering, Christ suffers it. He takes it to the cross.

God adopts us in Christ, and so God takes us as we are. God chooses us not because we are worthy or that we are qualified or even likable.

God chooses us because God loves us and adopts not only that which is positive in us but also suffers that which is painful or causes pain.

With this adoption we become co-heirs with Christ. Our birthright is a shared birthright. It belongs to Christ but it is shared with all. No one person lays claim to it through status or merit or piety. It is given freely by a God who loves us enough to endure all of who we are. Our inheritance is much bigger than an estate, or things, or even eternal life. Our inheritance is God. We are given God. Full communion with God, as our parent, our mother, our father. As one who dwells within us and cannot be lost or taken from us ever again. We are given a God who would dwell within us. Something that cannot be taken from us, whether by trickery or by force.

Adoption is very real to me. My parents adopted my brother and sister when I was just 1 year old. There is no distinction for me between my biological sibling and my adopted siblings. And it's not the paperwork filed somewhere in the halls of government that removed this distinction. God gives us a spirit of adoption and so God defines family, not our DNA and not the government.

There was no distinction in my heart and mind but for most there was an obvious distinction. My brother and sister had brown skin, and I and my parents and sister had pink skin. When my parents adopted my brother and sister, they did not just adopt two orphaned children. They adopted the pain of racism and racial prejudice. I cannot separate the love for my sister and I cannot remember my deceased brother without wanting for them a just and equal birthright. In this adoption I received a great gift, a brother and sister who I love but also a glimpse of just how much bigger God's love is than our fractured and pain filled world and a passion for reconciliation. And so, beginning in high school, I have been I have been drawn to efforts and ministries of racial reconciliation.

I believe that all families adopt. No matter how a family is formed we still must choose to adopt. It doesn't matter how a child comes to be a part of our family, we all still choose whether we really are going to take in a child fully, for who they are, and allow them to change who we are and how we live our life. When we adopt another we change our priorities and change where our lives are centered. When it comes to your child, you choose to fight for equality and justice, for belonging and acceptance, for healing and compassion. Whatever your child suffers, you suffer.

This is what God has done for us. This is how God loves us. All of who God is has been given to us.

It's remarkable that we have had so many young people join the church. Less and less youth, and young adults, are choosing the church.

We often discuss: how can we be a church that people will choose. We create programs or worship that people will choose. We market ourselves so people will choose us.

The spirit of adoption that God gives us is pressing us to do more than to try and get chosen. The Spirit of adoption moves us to be a people who choose others. To adopt them. To take on their challenges, to hurt and to sacrifice for them.

The 17 high school students who were confirmed today are not here because of a program or because of teaching alone.

They are here because people of this church adopted them, became their Sunday school teachers, their LOGOS table parents, and their youth advisors. They are here because they had people who listened to them and accepted them and loved them. People who re-centered and re-ordered their lives to be there for them. They adopted them.

One advisor gave many reasons on why she is an advisor but one stuck with me. She saw her children nurtured, adopted by the church, and wanted to then be that for other youth. To give back. She has been given a spirit of adoption.

These students were adopted and my prayer is that they will respond with this same spirit of adoption. That they will not be driven simply by their own hunger, their own desire, or attempts to build up some materialistic birthright.

Youth who have seen the birthright of the “American Dream” be heavily borrowed against, traded, sold out, or simply stolen. On the news we see many who despise the birthright now and are very angry.

My prayer for these students, and really for all of us, is that:

First, we will not replace the birthright we have been given through Jesus Christ with anything else, the American Dream or any other dream or ideology. It all begins with finding, knowing, and trusting the God who lives within you.

Second, don't despise what you don't have. Don't let your heart be filled with anger, envy, greed, or hunger for things that really only trade what God has given you for a spirit of fear and slavery. Stand up and speak out against injustice but with love and because of love, not bitterness.

Finally, ask God for the Spirit of adoption. This is the living God within you who will guide you to be people who don't simply choose to be involved in church, but to be people who choose to share your new common birthright with the world.

Be inspired by other young people with a Spirit of Adoption:

There are the three young guys who started Krochet Kids.

The three guys are Kohl Crecelius, Travis Hartanov and Stewart Ramsey, who were dubbed the “Krochet Kids” after they started crocheting their own hats in high school to wear while snowboarding. Inspired by a desire to help people living in poverty, the three friends traveled to Uganda in 2007 and taught a small group of women how to crochet. Today, the nonprofit Krochet Kids organization employs over 100 women in Uganda and more in Peru who divide their time between crocheting beanies and attending classes on topics such as personal budgeting and business management. The mission of Krochet

Kids is to blend humanitarian aid and financial education in a way that empowers people to become self-reliant.

And then there are:

Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole who when, not much older than these high school students, traveled to Africa. They produced a documentary that revolves around Africa's longest running war, where children are being kidnapped and turned into child soldiers by the army of Joseph Kony, known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). This caused the children to night commute, or walk miles every night to places of refuge in order to avoid these troops. They began an organization called "Invisible Children" which is chiefly responsible for President Obama agreeing to send in advisory troops to help Ugandans stop Joseph Kony.

The Spirit of Adoption is moving people to act and you can begin right now. You can listen within your own heart for where and who the Spirit is leading you to embrace. It does not have to be as far away as Africa. And we don't have to be young either.

We all can begin right now. Whether it's committing or renewing our commitment to be teachers, youth advisors, and volunteers, within the programs of the church or reaching out to the refugees, the homeless, the homebound, or the prisoners, may the Spirit of adoption move you to joyfully share the new birthright, the right to be called children of God, that comes in Jesus Christ our lord.