

December 17, 2017
Sermon for The Third Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
John 1:9-13

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

John 1:9–13 (ESV)

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰
He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did
not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive
him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave
the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of
the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Between 1854 and 1929 over 200,000 orphans in cities like New York, Boston and Philly were placed on trains and shipped west, across the United States.

These trains would periodically stop for viewings.

Viewings? Yes, children would be lined up like cattle at an auction.

Potential parents would ask questions, evaluate health and often examine children's teeth. If chosen, the children had a home.

If not, they got back on the train—the Orphan Train.

Lee Nailing was on the Orphan Train. You can read about it in a book called *The Orphan Train Rider: One Boy's True Story*.

Lee was eight years old when, along with his two younger brothers, his dad took him to a train station in New York City. Lee's dad gave him an envelope that had in it his dad's name and address. Lee's dad told him to write as soon as he reached his final destination.

When Lee Nailing got off the train in Texas the envelope was gone.

I wish I could tell you that Lee's father found him. That Lee's father sold the farm so he could reunite with his family. I'd like to describe that moment when Lee heard his father say, "Son, it's me. I came for you!"

But I can't. Lee Nailing's father never came looking for him. He didn't have an address or know where to start looking.

But your Father in heaven comes looking for you.

And it wasn't like He put you on a train to send you away either.

You didn't have an envelope with an address to hang on to, you just took off, running; following sin. Or maybe you did, maybe you knew who God was, but you just left His address, His Word, behind.

But still, God came for you!

That's the point of the first chapter of John: *Your Father in heaven comes looking for you.* Do you feel like you're stuck on the Orphan Train?

Have you been rejected, time after time? That might be how you feel. But feelings are not facts. Feelings are not facts! These are the facts.

Your Father in heaven comes looking for you!

Biblical authors sometimes place their most important information in the middle.

The meat is in the middle, just like a sandwich!

In Genesis 11:1–9 (the Tower of Babel) the middle is Genesis 11:5, "*The Lord came down.*" In Isaiah chapters 2 through 12 the middle is Isaiah 7:14, "*You shall call his name Immanuel.*"

And today, smack-dab, right in the middle of John 1:1–18 are these words. "*He gave right [or authority] to become God's children.*" (John 1:12b)

He. Who is the "he"?

He is our heavenly Father. In John 1:1–18 our heavenly Father creates the universe through the Word—Jesus. And then He sends John the Baptist to tell us about Jesus. And then our heavenly Father gives us the Word made flesh—Jesus—who is full of grace and truth, through Him we receive one blessing after another. "He" is our loving Father.

Gave. Who gave? What's the big deal? Earthly fathers give.

How much more our heavenly Father! John 3:34, "*The Father gives the Spirit without limit.*" John 5:21, "*The Father raises the dead and gives them life.*" John 16:23, "*My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*" And then the biggest one of them all, John 3:16, "*God so loved the world that he gave...*"

Earthly fathers, no matter how much they love us, can't come close to what our heavenly Father gives.

But what if God changes His mind? What if God reverses His plan? We all know that He has every reason to do so. We stumble. We fall. We lack. We sin. We rebel. And we mess things up. Will God finally have enough of us?

Spouses do. Employers do. Friends do. Coaches kick players off the team. Principals expel students from school. Parents abandon their children at train stations—just ask Lee Nailing.

How do we know God won't do the same? After all, He is holy and pure and just and righteous and we are anything but.

Put all fear aside, because He gave... **Authority.** The disease has gone on for far too long. It has infected and killed countless people. It brings with it abandoned dreams and empty hearts.

The disease I'm talking about goes by two words—"I can't." It attacks self-control. "I can't resist the bottle." It attacks marriages. "I can't forgive." It attacks nerves, "I can't find peace." It attacks faith. "I can't believe." "*I just can't!*" The devil uses sin to his advantage and convinces us that we just cant!

"He gave authority." Authority!

We're not helpless and hopeless. We are not powerless and without a prayer.

"He gave authority." Or as our translation says, the right. One writer defines the Greek word, *exousia*, right or authority, with these words—"legitimate power from a competent source."

"Legitimate power from a competent source." Legitimate power enables us to slam the door on "I can't" and say, "I can!"

Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength!"* And the competent source giving us the power is almighty God! He gave authority...

He...gave the authority... **To Become God's Children.**

Jesus explains how this happens to Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus teaches that we are born again and become God's children through water and the Spirit. We call that Holy Baptism.

We might think of baptism like a car wash. You go in a filthy clunker and you come out with your sins washed away—a cleaned-up clunker. True. We're no longer defined by our failures of any kind! But there's more.

Our old clunker isn't just cleaned up in the car wash of baptism, it's all brand new! That means the interior is new. So are the tires. And so are the doors and windows. In fact, everything is new through no merit or worthiness of our own! We are not clunkers anymore!

That's why Jesus tells Nicodemus that when people are baptized they are born again. *When you are baptized you get a new you. You get a new you!*

But there's even more.

In Holy Baptism God also adopts you into His family. And adopted children are chosen children. That's not the case with biological children. When the doctor handed me to my mom and dad, there was no "Plan B." No loophole. No choice. No exit strategy. He couldn't give me back to the doctor and ask for a better-looking, smarter, or more athletic son.

But if you were adopted, your parents chose you.

Surprise pregnancies happen. But surprise adoptions?

I've never heard of one. If you were adopted your parents could've picked a different gender, a different color, or a different nationality. But they didn't.

They chose you. They wanted you.

So does your heavenly Father. Remember? *He comes looking for you!*

"You have received the Spirit of adoption as children, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:15)

The heavenly Father doesn't adopt us because of our talent, our temperament, our taste, scars or our tattoos. He adopts us because He loves us.

And we all know that adoption isn't cheap. People spend tens of thousands of dollars to adopt just one child.

What did God pay to adopt us?

The cost was astronomical. It cost Him His only Son—*Jesus*.

Jesus who died. Jesus who lives. Jesus who loves!

Remember Lee Nailing? The eight-year-old orphan whose father never came looking for him? Lee's two other brothers were chosen, but not Lee. Lee was stuck on the Orphan Train for four months—four miserable, monotonous months!

Finally, *finally*, with his little heart ready to break, Lee was adopted by a tall Texas man and his short, sweet wife. The next day they introduced Lee to their friends with these words—“This is our new son, Lee.” Not our adopted son, but our son.

Sometimes we ask, “Do I count for anything?” Everything from high school to old age leaves us feeling rejected. We push back. We try to validate our existence. We do more. We buy more. We achieve more. We get more. But we still wonder, “Do I count for anything?”

Yes you do! *Yes you do!*

You are not stuck on the Orphan Train! Lee Nailing’s story is a true story and so is yours! It’s a true story! How so? John 1:12, “*He gave authority [the right] to become the children of God!*”

You are baptized! You are God’s children. The past is past. The future is bright. God’s Word is sure. Rest in your adoption.

You are His chosen child!

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Sermon Outline

Chosen Children

John 1:9-13

- I. He Gave.
- II. Authority.
- III. To Become God's Children.

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