

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“Rooted and Grounded in Love: Drafted by God”
Rev. Dr. John Judson
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Genesis 12:1-3, Ephesians 1:1-14

The tryouts were over. All of us had done our best. We had run the bases, tried to prove that we could hit the ball, showed that we could catch the ball and that given a chance we would make a great addition to some Little League team. The coaches had taken copious notes and met in some smoke filled secret location to figure out who would take whom in the draft; some kids they probably fought over. Others like me it was “You sure you don’t want him.” But then the day arrived; the day of the draft when we would discover where we would end up. All of the boys gathered at the field and the coaches, one by one, called out the players who were on their teams. Excitedly we would make our way onto the field in small clumps. The coaches would then hand us our t-shirts and hats. Then in that moment, something magical happened. We were no longer just kids, we were ball players; ballplayers with dreams of glory and greatness. We were part of a team; part of something greater than ourselves. It was a wonderful day.

How many of you have ever been there? It may not have been Little League, or even a sports team, but you wanted to be part of something greater than yourselves and you got drafted; you got selected and suddenly you were part of a team. Maybe it was a fraternity or sorority. Maybe it was an academic team. Maybe it was a job you had always wanted with a company you always wanted to work for. Or maybe you actually got drafted and joined the military. If you have had any of these experiences then you have some idea of what Paul’s opening sentence in Ephesians is all about. What Paul was trying to tell the Ephesians and is trying to tell us is that we have been drafted by God, made part of Team Jesus and have been given appropriate attire that mark us out as members of that team. I know this may seem a bit of an over reach, but bear with me.

First God drafts us just like those coaches drafted my friends and me. Paul writes, “Just as God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love, he destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.” What this means is that God chose us long before we knew that God existed. This is one of the most difficult concepts for those of us in the 21st century to wrap our heads around...that God drafts, or chooses us and we do not choose God. I think our image is more like that of high school athletes who are approached by a variety of colleges, each trying to make their case that the athlete should choose them. Then the athlete makes the choice. We think that we are free agents who are approached by a wide variety of belief systems and we choose God in Christ to follow. What Paul tells us though is that even before the foundation of the world God had already drafted us and that our destiny was to become followers of Jesus. OK, I know I sound like Obi-Wan Kenobi in Star Wars, “Luke this is your destiny”, but in some ways this is the image Paul offers. We are drafted by God in order to work for Team Jesus.

The second part is that God calls us over and makes us members of the team, just like those coaches called us onto the field. This is what Paul is talking about when he states, “In Jesus we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses...and with all wisdom and insight he has

made known the mystery of his will.” All of these words suggest movement; movement from being those who are not members of Team Jesus to those who are. Redemption means that our relationship with God has been rebuilt and restored. We are no longer those who keep God at arm’s length, but that we move toward God, just as my friends and I did when the coaches called our names on that Little League field. Forgiveness is also movement. It says that we are no longer trapped in our old lives, and in our old ways of doing things; that we are new people who are capable of playing our positions on the team. Finally there is the vision of wisdom; that once we had no idea what God was up to, but now in Jesus we have been given the insight and wisdom we need to be part of God’s work in the world.

The final part is that God gives us a uniform just like the coaches handed us uniforms that marked us out as part of their team. Paul tells the Ephesians that they, and by extension we, “...were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;” I have to say that some of my most vivid memories are of putting on the uniform before a game. It didn’t matter if it was Little League, high school football, college soccer...or even our church men’s basketball uniform, all were these moments when my purpose became clear...to give everything I had for the team. This image is the heart of the seal of the Spirit. A seal in the first century was a mark which showed that the thing or the person who was marked belonged to another. This mark gave believers their identity. Paul tells us that this identity is what the Holy Spirit does for us. It sets us apart as being part of Team Jesus; as being part of God’s community of faith.

The question for us this morning then, is why have we been made part of this team? Why has God, out of God’s infinite love, made us part of this team? Some people say it’s so we can be better than others; holier than others; set apart from others. Some say that we are part of this team so that we can be saved and get to heaven; so we can be raptured out of here. Yet, if we allow the totality of scripture to speak to us, we will see that our role is to bless the world. When we became part of Team Jesus, we became part of the family of Abraham. And in being part of the family of Abraham we have become those through whom the world was to be blessed; and we are certainly living in a world that needs blessing. This past week alone we have witnessed nine people killed in a church in South Carolina and two block parties, one in Philadelphia and another right here in Detroit, where shooters killed and wounded innocent people. While we may be shocked by this we shouldn’t be. On an average day in America more than ninety people are murdered. We live in a world in which hatred, racism and fear rule our lives. What we are to be about then is to bless this hurting world.

As members of Team Jesus we are to bless the world by refusing to be caught up in the violence and hatred that consumes so much of humanity. We are to be those who offer up the antidote of love, grace and forgiveness in order that the world can be healed. This is a task that only we can perform. The government can’t do it. Helping organizations cannot do it. Only we, the church, Team Jesus can pour forth this kind of love into the world. The challenge I want to give you for this week then, is to ask yourselves, “How am I blessing the world as a member of Team Jesus, where I live, work and go to school?”