As the six of you who come to Sunday School know we have been looking at the Book of Genesis and this past week we went through the story of Noah and the Ark. In culture and especially in children’s literature, Noah and the Ark are often portrayed in a happy light, with cute zebras peeking over the side and giraffes poking their heads through the roof of the ark. But for the humans, elephants and kangaroosies roosies, who were not on the ark, the whole thing was probably not a tremendous amount of fun unless you are really into drowning. For the story of the ark, if you recall, is that God has had enough of the wickedness of the world and so wipes out everyone save Noah, his family and two of every kind of animal. If you want some quick trivia Noah was allowed to take seven pairs of the clean animals probably in case the kids got hungry or if he needed something to sacrifice. It is a difficult story because God does not seem to be very nice and he does not offer any second chances. But one of the questions this apparent harshness raises is what exactly is God supposed to do about the evil that is in this world? If humanity refuses to change then are there options besides the Noah option, which in Air Force parlance is deigned, “rubble doesn’t cause trouble.” If there are no humans around then they can’t really make a mess of things? But after the whole flood is over and Noah and his family have all gotten of the Ark (in Armenia by the way) there is an interesting line, God says, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” In other words, God is saying he won’t wipe out humanity, not because we have changed our ways but rather because even if he does, we will come back just as rotten as we were before. Or as the rhythm and blues artist Louis Jordan told us, “What’s the use of getting sober when you’re gonna get drunk again?”

And so, we are left with a sort of depressing conclusion – there is no hope for us. If God leaves us alone, we sin; if God wipes out the evil ones on the earth those remaining will step up their game and sin. And so, if God playing a game of divine whack a mole only gets us to this dispiriting outcome, is there is another way? And fortunately for us there is and it is the one that St. Paul lays out today in Ephesians where we read, “He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.” It’s a crazy and radical solution but it solves the dilemma of sin keeping us from being in communion with God. The phrase that Paul uses to explain this new solution is adoption which in my humble opinion is a very good word to use to explain what has happened in Jesus Christ (I am sure St. Paul is relieved to hear that I approve of his explanations). For think of what happens in adoption, the adopted person does not change physically or mentally but there is a change legally. They become part of new family or if you want the legal definition adoption is, “the legal process by which the rights and obligations of a child's natural parents are extinguished and equivalent rights and obligations are vested in the adoptive parents. The effect of an order is to have the child treated as if it had been born as a child of the marriage.” And so, what Paul is telling us is that through the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth we are now able to be adopted into the family of God with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. God is starting from the position that he explained in Genesis, the one where he said we were evil from our youth. But then he finds a solution. God finds a way to fix a world full of sinful people without killing them. Which leads to the present reality in which we live – a fallen world with a solution given through God.

Now and then there will be some calamity and you will here the question asked, “Why didn’t God do anything to stop it?” And while I certainly understand the sentiment, I am not sure what people want God to do. If there is a hurricane that is set to hit Miami, do we want God to alter its course to go up the coast a little and wipe out those jerks in Boca Raton? Or are we asking God to completely change how weather functions on earth? Fixing one thing can cause deleterious effects somewhere else. I mean do we really want God to turn us into a pillar of salt every time we are about to do something sinful? The solution that God ultimately came up with for our sinfulness still allows for bad things to happen because God has allowed free will to remain. And the reason he allows free will to remain is because without it we would not be able to love God. So, we are left with a world that still has problems but a world where God has made provisions for us to be in communion with him. Our adoption brings us into the family but that adoption does not mean that all will be sunshine and lollipops and the reason for this is that when we are adopted by God, we do not change our physical location like in a regular adoption. In other words, we do not pop up to heaven. Instead we continue living with the same family and the same circumstances that we had before and so the change that comes is different. The change that comes must happen inside of us as we grow more into the likeness of our heavenly family. The adoption is not about a change in physical reality like earthly adoptions, but is rather about growing into the likeness of our heavenly family. I generally do not like statements that begin with phrases like the most important part of being a Christian is… So, I will just say a really important part of being a Christian is this change that happens with adoption, where we are loved, accepted and forgiven unconditionally and we return this love by growing into the likeness of our heavenly father. Another way to saying growing into the likeness of God is to say that we are growing in holiness. We are setting aside all of the behaviors and actions that resemble the fallen world and take on the characteristics of God. Now certainly we will not fully achieve it and certainly we will need God’s grace to achieve even the most minor of steps, but that is the goal. As St. Paul says in the letter to the Philippians, “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Our adoption is upward. In Genesis God admitted that our default setting is that we would always be a desire to sin, but he did not give up but rather came up with a way that we could be in communion with him that did not involve drowning. And that way as St. Paul tells us is “through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

Living in a fallen world is complicated because we know that things are not as they should be including within ourselves. And under normal circumstances this would keep us isolated from God. But in the death and resurrection of Jesus this chasm has been bridged so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.