

Our God-Begotten Selves
The Reverend Debbie Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield
First Sunday After Christmas, Year A, Revised Common Lectionary
December 30, 2007

I had a pretty secure upbringing as a child. My parents worked hard on their marriage, and they definitely worked hard as parents. And while there were times that I am sure they were disappointed with me, angry with me, or just plain fed up with me, I knew deep down that I was loved, and that nothing would change that. An example: I am a 19 or 20 year old college student, and my roommate and I went to a bar on Route 1 in North Brunswick. As normal, we pocketed our essentials and locked the remainder of our purses in my car trunk. Problem was—I also locked the keys in the trunk—and didn't realize it until after midnight. The cops were of little help, AAA couldn't come out, we couldn't reach our other roommates, so I was left to make the humiliating phone call home to my dad to come and rescue us with his spare set of keys. My dad did come, opened the car, and then even took us to a diner afterwards. To this day, I am chastened and grateful—and it is one of my dad's most favorite stories to tell. But even through all of his kidding, I know that nothing changed his love for me.

The love of a parent and child is a complicated thing. I know as a parent, I would risk or sacrifice anything for the welfare of my children—even their anger and disdain. Sometimes, oftentimes!, that comes with the territory of parenthood! I want to see them happy and whole and to grow into independent, loving, mature persons. Sometimes that means stepping out when I'd rather step in, biting my tongue when heaven knows I have a wonderful comment to make. As I have teenagers, the dance we have is complex and constantly changing, to say the least. But always, they will be my children, and there is nothing that can be done to change that. Ever.

This commitment between parent and child is, and always will be, a choice. Biologically, the ties are set—but a parent/child relationship is more than a matter of biology. Ask any parent of an adopted child. It is a relationship built over time, by steadfast love, by trust, by enduring

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commitment. We always have the freedom to nurture and grow that relationship, or to damage it or let it wither away. Feelings of guilt and obligation aside, we do have the power to choose.

Through Jesus, we also become children on God. It says in John's gospel that 'he gave power to become children of God', but the power referred to here is not of force or coercion but of liberty, of freedom—the power to choose. We are free to accept or reject God's great love for us, accept or reject God's open-handed offer of adoption as a child of God, through the sacrament of baptism. Which ever way we choose, God loves us, desires us, blesses us. Nothing we can ever do will change that.

And while it may not seem so at first glance, there is a deep enduring benefit when one chooses to become a child of God. It is relationship. In accepting the free gift offered by God through Jesus, we open the door to a relationship of trust and love and commitment with the One who will always embrace us, always welcome us home. We learn to trust God's promises to always walk with us, through good times and bad. As we travel with God, we deepen our relationship with God, and come to know the love that never leaves us. We may not get everything we ask for, but we will never be denied that which we need most—the presence of God in our lives. And even as we learn about how to live from our parents here on earth, so we learn how to live and love from our Father in heaven. Our time with our Lord is well spent—for are shaped by His teaching just as we are shaped by our parent's examples. Our hearts, our lives are slowly but steadily transformed by His.

Just as we have been granted choice in this matter, know that God, too, had a choice as well. God chose to create us, chose to make room in this vast universe for creatures other than God's self. Not only that, but God chose to limit God's freedom by the amount of free will that

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we have been given. God can command stars and moons, suns and galaxies, but God chooses not to command the human heart. Instead, God chooses to love unconditionally, always inviting a loving response in return. For true love is not commanded—it is gift.

This season, Christmas season, is a time that we remember God’s gift of love and life and light. From creation to the present moment, God is at work, loving us, guiding us, and desiring that as we grow in God, we grow into the loving, compassionate, just persons we are called to be. Nothing, not even the gift of God’s only son to show us the face and nature of God, is too high a price to pay for our loving Creator. The choice of whether to accept and live out that gift as baptized members of the Body of Christ is ours to make, each and every day.

For, as Eugene Peterson translates in the book *The Message*, “whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to their true selves, their child of God selves. These are the God begotten, not blood-begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten. The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one of a kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.”

May we children of God always remember to whom we belong—and live out God’s eternal call to love.

Amen.