

## **NOT ASHAMED**

Some time ago, Barbara and I sat down to watch the movie Flight starring Denzel Washington. The story is about an airline pilot. This pilot is both a drunk and a drug addict. He is divorced from his wife and estranged from his son. Distressingly, he shows up to fly both drunk and high, but he has become good at covering it up. He spins a thick web of lies and lives in denial about his condition. So, he allows the copilot to fly the plane while he sleeps off his high. But then the plane suffers a mechanical difficulty and he heroically crash-lands the plane. Out of two hundred passengers and crew only 6 people die.

The rest of the movie is about this pilot's struggle with his addiction and the attempts that he and his attorneys make to shield him from prosecution. Right at the end of the movie, he has the opportunity to tell one more lie to get himself off from prosecution, and he can't do it. He couldn't lie anymore, not even to himself. So, he admitted in front of the tribunal what he had done, on the record, and he wound up going to jail for it.

Now you may say, "What does that have to do with me?" My life doesn't look anything like that. Of course, you're right. The thing is that my life doesn't look like this either. But the thing about a great story is that it speaks to the human condition. I'm not addicted to drugs or alcohol, but I am addicted to other bad habits. Just like this character, I have sins to atone for. But even more than that, I have lied to myself about the sins that I have committed. Also, I have been in denial about it. I have lied to myself and to others about the nature of my sin.

The book of Hebrews is one of the more mysterious books in the scripture. For one thing, nobody knows exactly who wrote it. Furthermore, the author presents what theologians refer to as a high Christology. That means that Jesus is presented as being more divine than human. As a result, the language used in the letter to the Hebrews is extremely flowery and much of it is poetic. That makes it much more difficult for the reader.

The passage we have in front of us is a good example of this. Listen again as he says, "It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, 'I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.' And again 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Here am I and the children whom God has given me.'

There is so much we can learn here. I've always been taught that the task of the preacher is to preach good news. In my opinion, this passage is one of the most theologically dense passages in the entire scripture. There is a lot of good news here. For

me, the best news is this simple statement that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brother and sister. It's good news but if that's good news, that brings up a question. Why not? Why is Jesus not ashamed to call us brother and sister?

You know there is an old saying that you are known by the company you keep. What does it say about Jesus is not ashamed to call me a brother? In the ancient world, it's a big deal to call someone brother. Honor was more important than life itself. To call someone brother or sister is, literally, to make someone a member of your family, and therefore to take responsibility- as families do- for the behavior of family members. After you make someone your brother or your sister, your honor is tied to theirs. If your brother or sister acts honorably, you are honored. If your brother or sister acts dishonorably, you are dishonored. Adopting someone into the family is never done lightly.

So why would God be willing to adopt me? With all of my brokenness, with all of my bad habits that I'm addicted to, with the lies I've told to cover it up, the sins I've committed, and been in denial about, frankly, it seems like Jesus should be ashamed to adopt me.

Well, this passage reminds me that God exists for all things. The very purpose of God's existence is for the universe itself. It is also through all things that God exists. I was created by God. That alone tells me of God's love.

Now we have taken the theological stance that Jesus Christ was begotten of the Father: the only Son. Yet, since we are created by God, God is also our Father- by adoption. The one who sanctifies- that is Jesus Christ- has the same Father as the one who is sanctified and you. Despite my sin it pleased the Father to save me. So, Jesus was not ashamed to save me- because I'm a member of the family.

I've told some of you that I took a year off from seminary and did a year- long internship at Government Street Presbyterian Church in Mobile. One of my duties while I was there was to preach occasionally- about once a month. It was really the first time that I spent any significant time preaching. Other than that, I had preached maybe once or twice here and there- preached at my home church- preached in front of the seminary crowd- but not really that much anywhere else. Here I had to preach once a month. One morning after one of my sermons, a young lady who came up to me after church. Her countenance suggested to me that she was depressed. She said to me something along the lines of this, "I don't feel worthy to be God's servant."

Being God's servant isn't about being worthy. If it were, God wouldn't have any servants. God deliberately chooses to accept, adopt and work through people who are decidedly unworthy. He does so because he created them. You can see this in the story of the life of Jesus. Look at the people with who he interacted. He was constantly criticized for eating with tax-gatherers and sinners. He saved someone caught in the act of prostitution from execution. Called a tax collector out of a tree, to go and have dinner at his house. The list goes on and on and on.

Christ isn't ashamed of any of us: amused by us, perhaps- disappointed at times- but never ashamed. Christ instead greets us as brothers and sisters, even at the risk that what we do reflects dishonorably on him. He is not ashamed to welcome anyone. That is what sets him apart. That is what makes him so graceful, so merciful and so loving. Christ is not ashamed.