



LESSONS IN GRATITUDE FROM A RESCUE DOG

Settling down to write is a challenge, as I restlessly confront the empty page. God never fails to inspire and guide me, and I know He has called me to this work and equipped me for it. Still, it is hard to settle my mind and body, not knowing where to start while acutely aware that there is a lot of hard work and a fixed deadline ahead. Procrastinating, I decide to clear out some emails first.

This little sidestep offers endless opportunities to get distracted by inconsequential topics. This time, I sheepishly admit that I allowed myself to be drawn in by the so-called competitors in Puppy Bowl 2025. The annual Puppy Bowl is a contrived but charming event televised on Super Bowl Sunday, well-designed to encourage shelter pet adoption. (Bravo!)

After viewing Abigail, Smoosh, Mr. Pickles, and way too many other adorable puppies, I reined myself in and returned to the work at hand. Then, our creative God converted my distraction to his purposes, as only He can do.

Using the Puppy Bowl, He reminded me of what everyone I know who has adopted a shelter dog says: they can readily tell how grateful their pet is for their adoptive human and their forever home. Such pets become very devoted, take joy in pleasing their person, and appear to deeply appreciate the dramatic turn their life has taken through the kindness of a stranger. Can the same be said for those of us who have been spiritually rescued, adopted as children of God, and given an eternal home with Him?

Some of us, like abused or abandoned dogs, have no difficulty appreciating our “before and after” reality. Personally, I know that God “drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God” (Psalm 40:2-3). Others may have less dramatic testimonies, yet their lives, too, are altogether different.

The Bible helps us see the stark truth: we were spiritually dead, but have come to life. As the apostle Paul wrote, “...you were dead in your trespasses and sins...following the course of this world...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:1-2, 4-5).

Like shelter pets, we could do nothing to rescue ourselves. As Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16; also 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 1 Peter 2:4). But He did not choose us because we were the cutest puppies in the pound. Even the best of us were spiritually mangy, roughed up by life, full of bad habits, undisciplined, wary. But “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

When we cautiously crawl out of our confining cage toward freedom in Jesus, He knows that we need healing, rehabilitation, training, and love (Luke 4:18). He starts by feeding us with his holy Word, and offering us fresh Living Water (Matthew 4:4; John 7:37-38). He sanctifies us gradually, by teaching us to walk alongside Him and follow where He leads, helping us to trust Him more and more. He is patient with us as we shed our old ways, while never lowering his high vision of the new person we will become (Philippians 1:6).

He establishes limits for us for our own good, and searches for us if we stray (Exodus 20:1-17; Luke 15:4-5). He helps us bloom and thrive, becoming more and more who He created us to be. He promises that He will never leave us or forsake us — music to the ears of every rescued creature (Deuteronomy 31:8; Matthew 28:20).

Are we grateful every day for our adoptive Father God and our forever home with him? Do we live accordingly? May it be as obvious as a devoted rescue dog, wagging his tail at his new master’s side, eagerly doing his will (Matthew 6:10).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux