

Proper 11 Sunday Year A

7/19/2020

Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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Today, we will be focusing on our second reading from Romans eight. And I wish we could just park right here in the middle of this Romans chapter for the next 4 weeks.

There is so much here I would love to talk about...

between hope, suffering, the Holy Spirit, the renewal of creation...

let alone our topic today of adoption...

we could really cover so much.

There is so much good stuff in this chapter.

It is so rich.

Well, last week I talked briefly about the phrase *Children of God*.

We have people that are in Christ... Christians... Children of God.

And we have people that are not in Christ... unbelievers...

Not Children of God.

Now, in a certain sense...

all humans were created by God, so we are connected in that way...

We are children of God because we are all humans...

But that meaning of the phrase is foreign to the Bible.

In the Bible-sense we have the children of God and the people that need to become the children of God.

In our reading from Romans (8:14) it says:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

So only the people who are led by the Spirit... are children of God.

One of the reasons this is important to understand is because of the untruth or myth of what we call religious pluralism.

Religious pluralism... or pluralism in a theological sense...

refers to the idea that all roads lead to one.

In other words, that all the major religions of the world worship the same God just in different ways...

if one is faithful in a different religion other than Christianity they will also be in heaven.

The problem with this idea is that that is not what the Holy Scriptures teach...

it's not what our tradition teaches...

it is not what we believe.

I would also suggest that it is disingenuous to other religions too.

Many others... devout in their religions would also disagree with religious pluralism.

One could outline a whole lecture on why religious pluralism is contrary to our Christian faith.

I'll point out a few texts from our Holy Scripture...

Jesus said:

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6).

So, the only way to God is through Jesus Christ.

The Scripture also teaches:

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people...

(1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Once again... it is only through the cross of Jesus Christ that one can be in right relationship with the Creator.

This idea is important for our present text too.

In Romans we read:

...you have received a spirit of adoption.

When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:15-17).

You see if we are all children of God... then why do we need God's Spirit of adoption?

Clearly, before we receive the Spirit of adoption, we are not children of God.

But once we have received God's grace by faith...

the Spirit of God comes to dwell within us...

as Jesus said in John 3 – being born of the Spirit –

we become born into God's family... receiving the spirit of adoption.

Now adoption is a great word here...

St. Paul specifically chose it to express who we are in the family of God.

You see... Jesus radically changes our relationship with God...

it isn't just a relationship between Master and servant...

but a relationship of daddy and daughter... or father and son.

A different image of a slave calling out to his master as opposed to a child calling out "father," "abba," "papa."

Fr. Dave Pivonka, a Franciscan Catholic Priest describes why St. Paul specifically chose the word adoption.

He says that in the ancient world... in roman law... adoption was an intricate process with legal consequences.

The child's name was changed... they became a new person.

If the child had certain debts that were ascribed to them... the debts were cancelled when they were adopted.

There is a real sense of the old person being transformed into a new person.

Another interesting thing is that the child... by law...

received the same inheritance, rights, and privileges as any children who were born to the parents.

Now... perhaps a most interesting aspect of Roman law concerning adoption is this.

In the ancient world, you did not have to keep a child who was born to you who had birth defects, or a gender you didn't prefer or whatever reason you wanted to abandon the young one... you could... obviously very different than our society today...

Well, this was not the case with adoption...

you could never abandon a child that was adopted...

It was forbidden in Roman law to abandon an adopted child.

The thinking went that when you saw the child you were going to get and adopted him or her... you knew what you were getting...

any deformities, the gender, the disabilities...

you were choosing that child knowing about the child.

And if you chose that child, you could never abandon that child...

That was the law.

So why did St. Paul choose adoption in his letter he wrote to the church in Rome?

Because they knew the laws around adoption.

The special relationship that adopted kids had with their parents.

God has chosen you... a Spirit of Adoption.

Even with all your quiriness...

Nothing can sever this relationship.

God has not given us a spirit that we would fall back into slavery...

He has not given us a spirit of fear...

but we are adopted by a heavenly father...

a special love...

a love of choice...

that God chose you!

J. I. Packer... one of the premiere Anglican theologians of the 20th century... a professor of mine at seminary a decade ago...

he died on Friday at the age of 93...

he said these words:

Adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel.

To be right with God the Judge is a great thing,

but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater.

What he is talking about in this quote is the difference between mercy and grace.

Mercy means that we are not condemned for our sins.

We don't get what we deserve to get.

We do not serve the punishment...

In fact, Christ suffered the punishment for us.

Grace means that we become a child of the King of Kings.

We get what we don't deserve.

We deserve nothing – no good thing from God –

but we get all the wealth and goodness of the Almighty God.

We are children of God... co-heirs of God with each other...

co-heirs with Christ Jesus...

and we are waiting for that adoption day to be consummated when Jesus returns in glory.

If you are in Christ... if you are a Christian...

if the Spirit of God is inside you...

you have been adopted into the family of God...

Children of God.

This means that we are related...

Co-heirs with Christ in the wonderful blessing of God and our future with Jesus forever.

This also means as family... that we are in this together.

We are not just saved individually... but we are saved into a family.

Into a community... the people of God.

And any group of people, any family... has its struggles.

We won't always get along.

We won't always have the same opinions.

But we are family.

We forgive each other.

We serve each other.

We pray for each other.

We support each other.

And the perspective of who we are in the family of God is so important.

I have more in common... more relation... with someone who is my

Christian sister or brother with the exact opposite political point-of-view

... than I do with a non-believer in Jesus Christ who shares all of my

political preferences.

That is so important to remember in an election year...

especially one like this year.

Let me express it differently still...

I am more related to someone from a different race...

a different country... a different ethnicity... if they are a Christian...

than I do a white male US Citizen who is a non-believer in Jesus Christ.

Why?

Because we are both adopted into the family of God.

We are both children of God.

We are both going to live forever with each other in the very presence of the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We are children of God.

Joint heirs with Christ Jesus...

Waiting... for the day of his return.

And in our waiting...

Our posture is not pride... it is humility.

Our call is not selfish... it is to serve.

Our message is not brash... it is to love.

We don't point to ourselves... we point to the cross.

We are not people of fear... we are people of hope.

We are children of the living God...

And in our waiting, we share the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ... who came to give us life... to give us hope...

to call us to his own...
so that we may receive the Spirit of adoption.

So... as we wait patiently for the Lord's return...
May we be known for two things...

First, may we – by words and by actions – declare the goodness of
God... the kindness of God...
so that others may also become children of God.

And

Second, may we – by words and by actions – be faithful sons and
daughters of our heavenly Father...
holding on to our Daddy's hand... trusting...
even in the midst of the trials of this year.

And knowing that even when we fail...
Our Father in Heaven is **faithful**.

Amen.