

Spirit Of Adoption

Romans 8:12-25

July 23, 2017

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of (adoption). And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Now the New International Version of the Bible, which is the translation we use most often here, says we have received the Spirit of sonship. The Greek word translated "sonship" is actually the word "adoption". We have received the Spirit of adoption.

I think adoption is a pretty powerful image. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. This is taught in Scripture. It is a part of our creeds. We believe in God the Father; we also believe in Jesus...the Father's only Son...that is only begotten Son. So the image in Scripture is we have been adopted into the family of God.

We read from the eighth chapter of Romans. This chapter is all about the blessings of the Holy Spirit. In the seventh chapter Paul writes about his personal struggle with sin. He writes in the first person. I am sure we can identify. Paul says that he wants to do what is right and good, but it seems he cannot always do that. He wants to do good, but it seems there are times when he can't. He does not want to do bad things. He does not want to sin. But he does. It sounds a bit confusing when we read it. But we know what he means because his experience is ours. I mean, I am thinking that we would all like to do what is right...and do what is right all the time. Am I right about that? Is there anyone here who desires to do wrong...who desires to sin? But we do. We sin. We fall short. We know we fall short. And that can be frustrating at times.

Paul writes about his struggle with this. He knows sin is at work in him. So he almost cries out, "What a wretched man I am!" This is Paul we

are talking about. This is the guy who in another place tells his readers to imitate him as he imitates Jesus. Then he asks the question, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" He then answers his own question, "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Thanks be to God indeed.

Romans can be a somewhat difficult book to follow. Some of you have studied it. You know this is true. It is a book in which Paul sets out to prove a truth. He argues for a truth. He defends a truth. That truth is justification by faith. Paul states in this book of Romans that we are justified by faith. Our goodness does not save us...because we are not good. There is no one who is righteous, Paul says. He writes that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory...fallen way short of perfection. No one should ever think they are good enough. This, by the way, is why we never sit in judgment on another. Who am I to think I can say another is not good enough when I am not good enough. All have sinned. Paul further writes that the wages of sin is death. But to that he adds that the gift of God is eternal life. Eternal life is God's gift. And we are justified—we are made right with God—because of our faith. Faith...not works. Paul argues this truth through the first eleven chapters of Romans.

Oh that everyone would accept this good word. Followers of Jesus carry a wonderful message to the world. It is not about law. The law always condemns. God, in Jesus, offers the world forgiveness and mercy and grace. Our message is not that sinners must be condemned. Our message is sinners can be saved, and sinners can receive mercy and grace and forgiveness.

This eighth chapter from which we read begins with, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ

Jesus....” No condemnation. God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world. Jesus came to save it. We read this in John’s Gospel.

Okay...so perhaps my explanation of what Paul wrote about is as confusing as what Paul said. Just know this. We struggle with sin. But we are not condemned...not when we place our faith in Jesus. And when we put our faith in Jesus, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. All of us. And with the gift of the Holy Spirit comes many blessings. Paul writes about these in our text.

One blessing is we are adopted into the family of God...adopted through the Spirit. Paul says that when we placed our faith in Jesus, we did not receive a spirit of slavery. We received the Spirit of adoption. Not just any spirit of adoption...but the Spirit.

By that Spirit we address God the same way Jesus—the only begotten Son—addressed God. It was in the garden. Jesus said his soul was overwhelmed to the point of death. He fell to the ground and prayed and cried out, “Abba, Father....” Paul says we have received the Spirit of adoption. By that Spirit we call out to God, “Abba, Father.” We truly are children of God.

How do we know we are children of God? We know we are children of God because that same Spirit—the Spirit by which we call out, “Abba, Father”—that Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

See, among the Jews anyway, there was that part of the law which said there needed to be two or three witnesses to prove a thing as true. In Deuteronomy it says, “On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness.” It further says, “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” The idea is simply that any matter or issue needs at a minimum two witnesses to be established as true.

I am a child of God. This is a true statement. How do I know this is true? It is true

because I say it is true. And I say it is true because I have placed my faith in Jesus. I have accepted the grace of God. I am saved by grace through faith. Okay this is witness number one...me. One more witness is needed. That second witness is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I am a child of God. Paul says that in our text.

Listen! If you are ever feeling like maybe you are just not a child of God...you know...feeling unsaved or whatever...just relax. Let the Spirit of God assure you that it is okay. You are a child of God. Now perhaps someone is wondering how we might actually experience that witness of the Spirit. What will it sound like or feel like? Very good question.

Bear with me here for a few paragraphs. I’m going to refer to John Wesley. He preached a good many sermons. Try reading one or two of them sometime. I have a book that contains what is considered his fifty-two standard sermons. They are difficult to read. I find myself wondering what it was like to be sitting in a pew or in an open field listening to them. But many people came to Christ, and the movement known as Methodism resulted.

He had a few favorite topics. His favorite was the truth that we are saved by grace through faith. Preaching that message was what pretty much got him kicked out of the Church of England. Another favorite topic of his was what he called the witness of the Spirit...the thing we are talking about now. And he would ask in those sermons the same thing I just asked. How do we experience that witness? How do we experience the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit?

Now I don’t quote John Wesley too often, but I do like the answer he often gave to that question. His answer was—ready for this?—his answer was, “I don’t know.” No—not quite—he actually said it was hard to find words in our human language to describe what this witness might feel like. But it is a kind of inward impression in our spirits...something we just feel.

Here’s the deal. We don’t often hear or feel the Spirit moving in us because we are just so

busy. All kinds of activity outside of us and inside of us. We are overwhelmed by lots of stuff. When Jesus was overwhelmed he called out to God, "Abba, Father." Try that. Get alone with God. Go farther into the garden. Call out. And then listen. Be still. And let the Spirit bear witness with your spirit. It will happen.

Okay. So we are saved by faith and we receive the Spirit and the Spirit blesses us by confirming that we are children of God. There is another blessing that comes with this. It is the blessing of a different perspective on life...a kind of divine perspective.

I don't know about you, but for me life is not hunky dory all the time. We have brothers and sisters for whom life is way beyond just not being hunky dory. They are suffering. But we are children of God. The Spirit reminds us that we are children of God. This means that there is something better coming for us. Always something better.

Paul wrote in Philippians that our citizenship is in heaven. To the Corinthians he wrote, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

"Light and momentary troubles." Meditate on that phrase. Combine that with what Paul says in our text, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us." "Present sufferings not worth comparing."

So we call out to God. "Abba, Father." We enjoy the gift of the Spirit. We allow the Spirit to bear witness with our Spirit. Hey, we are children of God. This is true. Then we must fix our eyes on Jesus. Fix our eyes on the glory that will be revealed. Fix our eyes on where we truly live as children of God.

We can do that.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of (adoption). And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."