***ADOPTED AND ADORED***

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May 26, 2024

Texts: Romans 8:6-17 and John 3:16-17

*All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.* That is what Paul wrote to the church in Rome. He didn’t write: *All people are children of God*, but rather: *All* ***who are led by the Spirit of God*** *are children of God*. Old Testament writers were never so presumptuous as to suggest that we have such an intimate parent-child relationship with our divine Creator. The term *children of God* never appears in the Hebrew Scriptures, and we never read of God referred to directly as *Father* or *parent* by the prophets. The children of Israel are claimed by God as God’s people, a people cherished by God; but that relationship, as precious as it is, is never described in the terms of parent and child. That description awaits the coming of the child born in Bethlehem who is the Son of Mary and Son of God. It is he who introduces us into that loving relationship with God as parent – a God we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in three persons.

If Paul is right, and *all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God,* then are you a child of God, which is to ask, are you led by the Spirit of God, or is something else guiding your days, demeanor, and decisions? Paul identifies that *something else* as the *flesh*, what we might describe as worldly pursuits like wealth, power, or self-gratification. It is hostile to God because it offers an alternative set of values and way of life to that which God urges upon us. That life hostile to God, described by Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase of Paul’s letter to the Galatians as *trying to get your own way all the time*, is among other things marked by:

*loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; and ugly parodies of community.* [[1]](#endnote-1)

There are echoes of the seven deadly sins there, and if any of them accurately describes your life, then know that while you may claim to be a disciple of Jesus, you are being guided by something other than the Spirit who Christ promised would come to guide us, the Spirit of God who offers life and peace.

That Spirit inspires a different kind of life, a life that embraces Jesus’ Way of love, forgiveness, humility, grace, justice, and self-sacrifice. It is that same Spirit whose touch we affirm in baptism and ordination, the same Spirit who inspires in us faith and faithfulness. It is a Spirit who draws us closer to God and to one another in the family of God as children of God. It is not a family into which you were born, not a family which you chose, but a family into which you were adopted as God claimed you as one of God’s own children, and like all families, you don’t’ get to pick who is family and who is not; you get them all – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

You get Aunt Edna who wears too much perfume and shushes you in the pew in worship. You get Uncle Leonard who sings loudly and slightly off key. You get young Malcolm who is too smart for his own good, cousin Tom who always takes the last doughnut, and little Susie who is eight years old going on eighteen. You get brother George who falls asleep during the sermon every week, Aunt Lula who is more religious than God, and Uncle Seymour who is so old that he may have been at the stable that first Christmas. These are your brothers and sisters – the teacher who you loved and the one who you are pretty sure was trained in an East German prison, the doctor down the street and the dentist from across town, the guys who pick up your garbage on Tuesdays and the girl who bags your groceries at Food Lion and the woman in the nursing home whose mind is so much stronger than her body.

These too are your brothers and sisters – the homeless man on the street who loves to sing *Away in a Manger* but has nowhere to lay his head, and the woman in jail who had almost lost hope when she found Jesus, and the doctor trying to save lives in Gaza who is bone tired of the fighting and the fear. These too are your brothers and sisters – the refugees at our border who struggle to find bread and juice for communion, and the workers searching through the rubble in Ukraine and in the Midwest after yet another tornado. These all are your brothers and sisters, the siblings you did not get to choose any more than they got to choose you, for these are your brothers and sisters in Christ. The glue that holds this family together, the bond that binds us, is not the blood of lineage but the blood of Christ shed for you, for them, and for the world.

In a sermon years ago Martin Luther King, Jr. told of the death of a famous novelist. Among his papers was a list of possible plots for future stories, including this one: “*A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together*.” It sounds like a TV reality show! More significantly, suggests King:

*This is the great new problem of [hu]mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together - black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu - a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.[[2]](#endnote-2)*

This too is the great old problem of the Church. This Christian family that lives together is supposed “to exhibit the kingdom of heaven to the world” but is separated by theology and history, by polity and politics, by old grudges and new doctrines, by styles of worship and interpretations of Scripture. We don’t always get along, yet we are still one family in Christ, for it is not ours to choose our brothers and sisters, not ours to choose whom to include and whom to exclude in this family of God. That choice lies with God, and God has chosen to make us one family by adoption, not because we are so good, but because God so loved the world – not just the saints in the world, but the world in all its contrary messiness.

God makes us family by adoption in Christ Jesus in order to save us from the very sins that alienated us from God in the first place. In Christ, God welcomes home all the prodigal sons and daughters who thought their sins were too great to be forgiven. In Christ, God comforts those who mourn, for Jesus mourned the death of his friend Lazarus and understands that pain. In Christ, God embraces those who despair, for he knows the depths that can drive one to cry, “*My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?*” In Christ, God came among us so that God would know our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears, and so that we would know God has not forgotten us, but is with us always to the end of the age, constantly urging through the voices of prophets and preachers and saints across the ages: *My children, come home!*

Here in this place, at this table, with one another, we are home, for it is here that we remember where home is – with our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ including that brother who is Christ who was wholly human and wholly divine; here we are at home with the divine parent who invites us to pray, “*Our Father…*” And each time we say those words – *Our Father* – we claim trust in God our parent and admit what we may otherwise be hesitant to say, that we are related to one another as siblings and to all who say that prayer, including some of those we don’t like or with whom we refuse to speak day to day. Given all our squabbles and divisions, it is a great mystery that God should claim any of us as children. It is a mystery that echoes through the ages in the words of the psalmist:

*O Lord our Sovereign…*

*What are human beings that you are mindful of them?*

*What are mortals that you care for them?*

The good news to which we bear witness in this family is that God, our divine parent, is mindful of us, cares for us, and loves us with a love that never ends. That same God calls us to be mindful of and to care for and to love one another and our neighbors, for like it or not, we are siblings bound together not by agreement or common world view or family lineage or anything else but by this – the Spirit of God and faith in our Lord and brother Jesus Christ.

I once had the privilege of participating in an adoption as a young attorney charged with picking up the baby from the hospital and delivering him to his adoptive parents. Thankfully a nurse buckled him into the car seat, since I had no idea how that was supposed to work, and I remember hoping against hope that he wouldn’t wake up and start crying in the two-mile drive from the hospital to our offices. He didn’t. We arrived safely, and as I walked into the conference room with the little guy bundled up in my arms and handed him to the young couple who so desperately and anxiously longed to meet him and welcome him into their family, tears of love and joy streamed down their cheeks. For this child was not only to be adopted but loved and adored across his lifetime – and so it is with us. We too are adopted, loved, and adored by God, our loving parent, who embraces us with open arms saying, “My children, w*elcome home!*” Amen

1. Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, NavPress:2002, pp.2122-2123 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Martin Luther King Jr., Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? quoted in Practicing Our Faith, "Shaping Communities" by Larry Rasmussen, Dorothy Bass, ed. p.122 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)