“It’s a Family Affair”
Romans 8:12-17
March 29th, 2020

Speaking to his wife, the pastor said, "This morning's worship service went well, but I just don't think the sermon ever got off the ground."

His wife replied: "Well, it sure did taxi long enough."

I’ll try not to circle the airport endlessly either, if we actually achieve take-off!

As some of you participating in this service will know, our children grew up in a military home. Because I was on active duty for much of their childhood, we moved often. That meant we had to periodically say good-bye to what was familiar and comfortable, and then establish a new home and a new circle of friends in another state.

This also meant our children didn’t grow up around family. Maybe 3 or 4 times a year, they’d get to see their grandparents whether they came to visit us where we lived, or we took leave to go see them.

To bridge the gap between visits, our kids had a special couple in our church family who lived just a couple of blocks from us. Jim and Ann delighted in being, as they put it, “spare grandparents.” In a sense, they were adoptive grandparents to our kids.

Adoption is the theme of today’s passage of sacred Scripture from the New Testament Book of Romans. Romans was a letter written by the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, to the church that was meeting in Rome. And, since last September, we've been working our way through this incredible part of God’s Word, the Holy Bible.

The passage before us this morning is Romans 8:12-17. Romans Chapter 8 is the Apostle Paul’s greatest theological treatise. A German commentator from long ago named Spener said that if the Bible were a ring and the Book of Romans its precious stone, chapter 8 would be the sparkling point of the jewel. (From Boice, 782)

In verse 11, Paul had just instructed the Roman Christians that the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lived in them. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, He will give life to their mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within them.

Romans 8:12-17:
"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”
The first thing I’d have you note in this passage is this. Look how often Paul uses the language of family throughout these 6 verses:

- “Brethren or brothers” in verse 12;
- “Sons” in verse 14;
- “Abba, Father” in verse 15;
- “Adoption or sonship” in verse 15;
- “Children of God” in verse 16;
- “Children” in verse 17;
- “Heirs” typically refers to a family member, but not always (verse 17).

Seven times in 6 verses we see here the language of family. For sure, when God saves a person from the eternal punishment due his/her sins, He saves such ones to His people – to a family – the family of God. The lone ranger Christian is an anomaly; it is an unbiblical possibility. If you truly are a Christian, you will be part of the family of God. You will work out the salvation God has granted to you in the context of His people, the Church.

As we’re practicing social distancing during this present distress, we do so because it is necessary to overcome COVID-19. I support it as far as that goes to beat the corona virus. But we must also realize, as believers in Christ, we are to reach out from our physical isolation to fellow believers in ways that we can. Dear ones, fight the temptation to think you can get through this temporal inconvenience without receiving ministry from other Christians, or you reaching out to them. Don’t let isolation from the Church become your new normal after this has passed.

Don’t mistake what I’m saying - isolation, while necessary to combat this virus pandemic, is eventually spiritually unhealthy, even potentially deadly, to engaging in the deep fellowship believers enjoy in Christ. I simply cannot wait until the first Sunday after we’re cleared to be back together in worship – what a beautiful day that will be!

So, this passage reveals that participating in Christianity is a family affair. Other believers – our brothers and sisters in Christ – make up a family relationship that is deeper and even more vital than we have with natural family members. That’s the sense behind Paul’s use of the pronoun “we” in verses 12, 15, 16, and twice in 17, and the pronoun “our” in verse 16. Their antecedents refer to Paul the apostle God inspired to write the letter and the “beloved of God” and “saints” Romans 1:7 – Christians – the initial recipients of this letter.

- **Christians** are under obligation (debtors) to live according to the Spirit (v. 12);
- **Christians**, because of the Spirit of adoption/sonship cry out, “Abba, Father” (v. 15);
- **Christians** are the children of God (v. 16);
- **Christians** suffer with Jesus (v. 17);
- **Christians** will be glorified (v. 17).

Paul says in verse 12 that Christians are “debtors” – perhaps the version of the Bible that you’re using says “have an obligation.” As Christians, God has given us very much. We’ve seen,
as we’ve worked through chapters 5-7 of Romans, God has blessed believers by justifying us in Christ and walking with us in sanctification. Justification is “God’s forgiving sinners, and treating us as if we’d never sinned.” (*Catechism for Young Children*, Q & A # 50). Sanctification is “God’s making sinners holy in heart and conduct.” (*Catechism for Young Children*, Q & A #51).

And, now in *Romans Chapter 8*, we learn that God has blessed us with the spirit of adoption/sonship. “Adoption is the procedure by which a person is taken from one family (or no family) and placed in another. In this context, it refers to removing a person from the family of Adam (Satan) and placing him or her in the family of God.” (Boice, 838) Like being taken from the spiritual orphanage to the Church.

Pastor and author Tim Keller helps us here when he notes, in Paul’s day, “the moment adoption occurred, several things were immediately true of the new son. First, his old debts and legal obligations were paid; second, he got a new name and was instantly an heir of all the father had; third, his new father became instantly liable for all his actions (his debts, crimes, etc); but fourth, the new son also had new obligations to honor and please his father.” (Keller, 25)

In the newspaper some time ago, there was a story about the process families go through in adopting children. The account related the usual details: the huge number of couples wanting to adopt, the much smaller number of “desirable” children, the extremely long waiting lists, the high legal fees, the red tape, the resulting increase of interest in “surrogate parents,” and so on.

The story also told of the experience of the Williams family. The Williams’s, a deeply religious couple, had adopted four children thus far, and they hoped to adopt at least one more child in the future. For the Williams’s there were no delays and no waiting lists. The reason is that all of the children the Williams’s have adopted are disabled.

One, a son, has Down’s syndrome, and the other three, two daughters and another son, had major birth defects. All of the Williams’ children are, in the euphemism employed by the adoption agencies, “difficult to place.” In a world where virtually every prospective parent dreams of a bright, beautiful, and perfect child, the Williams’s have chosen to offer the embrace of their parental love to children almost no one else wanted.

“Our children are our greatest joy,” Mrs. Williams was quoted as saying. “Caring for them is what we’re on this earth for.” (Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 210-211).

Our debt, or obligation, in light of these blessings is to live for God. We are to live for Him and not according to our sinful natures. This is what verses 12 and 13 point out. We are not to live according to the flesh, but instead we are to be putting to death our sinful natures by not giving reign to the misdeeds of the body. If we belong to Jesus, if the Holy Spirit has joined us to Him, the past is dead for us, and we must now live as what we truly are – sons of God, children of God, and heirs, joint heirs with Jesus.
Before Jesus invaded our lives by grace and salvation, along with a new family, we were undesirable before Him. And, since that grace and salvation have become a reality, we now are undesirables to the culture. That’s what verse 17 refers to when it reads “we suffer with Him.”

Such suffering would include persecution, as many of our spiritual siblings endure in other parts of the world. But, even if we’ve not experienced persecution, we are acquainted with suffering. “We suffer when we lose a husband or a wife or other family member through death. We grieve when life itself or our friends or children disappoint us. We groan under pain and sickness. We are hurt by prejudice, poverty, or sometimes a lack of rewarding work. The list is endless. For sure, the path to glory involves a cross.” (Boice, 855)

Perhaps the most curious, if not familiar part of this passage is verse 15 – “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” One of the great privileges Christians have as children of God is the use of an intimate term of address, such as the Aramaic term “Abba.” It’s well known this means “Daddy.” Theologian Derek Thomas writes in his book, *How the Gospel Brings us All the Way Home*, “being able to say, ‘Abba! Father!’ is the heart of Christianity and our greatest privilege.”

Finally, there’s the blessing of inheritance as God’s children. Verse 17 says we are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,” An heir stands to benefit from an inheritance left by a benevolent family member or friend. In the present discussion in this verse, Christians are also “joint heirs” with Jesus. What on earth might this refer to?

As I read through the Bible this year, the Old Testament book I’m presently reading is Joshua. As God’s people entered the Promised Land (Canaan) and subdued their enemies, they acquired quite a bit of land, which of course was the promise God gave Abraham long before this in *Genesis Chapter 12*. The land was divided tribe by tribe, along the lines specified by Moses, even before the Israelites crossed the Jordan.

Every tribe was allotted its land – from Reuben to Judah, to Ephraim and Manasseh and the rest. All of them, that is, with the exception of Levi. Levi was the priestly tribe. *Do you recall what Levi’s inheritance was?* *Joshua 13:33* has the answer, “To the tribe of Levi Moses had given no inheritance; the Lord God of Israel was their inheritance…”

God Himself is our inheritance, Christian! There could be no greater, satisfying, excellent gift than God Himself – access to Him, the present life with Him, eternity with Him, and the assurance that all the promises of the Bible are all ours! God the Father is Whom we are joint heirs with Jesus of. The Psalmist in *Psalm 73:25-26* writes,

>“Whom have I in heaven but You?  
And there is none upon the earth that I desire besides You.  
My flesh and my heart fail;  
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”
As we close, let us strive to make this our aim throughout the day and the week to come. Let us live in such a manner that we realize our position and status with God because of the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We are animated by the Holy Spirit and as joint heirs with Jesus we will be forever with God in this life and the next - glory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once there were two women who never knew each other. One you do not remember, the other you call Mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One became your guiding star; the other became your sun. The first gave you life and the second taught you to live in it.</td>
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<td>The first gave you a need for love and the second was there to give it. One gave you a nationality; the other gave you a name,</td>
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<td>One gave you the seed of a talent the other gave you an aim. One gave you emotions; the other calmed your fears.</td>
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<tr>
<td>One saw your first sweet smile; the other dried your tears. One gave you up--it was all that she could do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The other prayed for a child, and God led her straight to you.</td>
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- Anonymous