

# You're In The Family Now!

A Pentecost Sunday Sermon  
Romans 8:14-18  
Acts 2  
Rev. Dr. Dawn Jeffers Ramstad  
Hudson United Methodist Church  
5 June 2022



“... You received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as God’s children.”

Romans 8:15

We often describe our relationship with others here at Hudson United Methodist Church is “my church family.” But how did we become a members of this family? Children join their families by either birth or adoption. Some families are only familiar with birth, other families are only familiar with adoption. But some families, like family John and I formed, use both ways to add children to our family. Today with our adult children’s permission, I am sharing what I learned through experience about my adoption by God that made you my church family. me a member of God’s family.

Our adoption story began before John and I met for the first time. My experience began when I was twelve years old. In February of my seventh-grade year, I was diagnosed with a type of heart disease, rheumatic myocarditis. According to the best medicine of the time, Dr. Munson (also our church’s senior high school Sunday school teacher) had to tell me I should not bear children. My instantaneous twelve-year-old reply was, “That’s okay. I’ll adopt.” Christine, a friend and fellow Methodist, was a biracial adoptee from Korea; her birth mom was Korean, her biological father was an American soldier. In our northern Minnesota childhood, most people guessed Christine was a member of the Ojibwa nation.

It took a long time for me to find a man who was interested in marrying a woman who already planned to adopt. But on one of our first long walks, John shared that he wanted a big family but only two biological children. Fortunately for me, my doctors had reversed themselves on pregnancy because my recovery from rheumatic

myocarditis was of the highest kind, largely because my parents made sure their teen daughter followed all the rules for full recovery from this form of heart disease.

Our sons were born first, our daughter was adopted when they were 8 and 6 years old and we lived in California. Lisa's godmother is Japanese-American, her godfather could pass as my brother. Most people guessed that their son was Hispanic. We were out together, four parents and four children, and most people guessed that our daughter and their son were siblings, that our sons were my sons, and at least half the time gave the boys the wrong father. It was a great guessing game, and we loved playing it!

The only difference between becoming a mother by birth versus adoption is bonding. When given the opportunity to visit about adoption with other moms like myself, we all find that how our child joined our family makes no difference in the depth of our love for each of our children. Because we can compare, we generally find bonding with our adoptive children as a mother is very much the same as all bonding with their children is for fathers. For adoptive mothers and all fathers, bonding is a form of love that comes because of a choice we made, not a biological coincidence.

As a rabbi, Jesus taught his followers to pray to God with the words "our Father." Every time we call God who created us "our Father" or "Father God," we are drawing on the common human experience of growing up loved by a person who chose to be our parent. In Jesus time there were no DNA tests to prove paternity; every child was birthed by their mother and was adopted by their father. The only exception in the Bible is when Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:1-10. Over the centuries as the Bible was first written, adoption was legally restricted to men. To be a legitimate heir every child had to be formally adopted by their father.

Our Creator chose to adopt us. Ever since the Spirit descended at Pentecost, God adopts us as sons and daughters through Christ's redemptive work on the cross and outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Like human adoption, our divine process is very sequential. Like my choice to adopt my daughter, God began the process to adopt us before we were even conceived. Adoption always begins with the parent's choice. Adoption is never accidental. Never.

Every family's adoption story has a beginning. In chronological time, our family's story began when I was only twelve, a few years before John came to his ethically driven desire to have a large family but only two birth children, and several years before we met. The parents of another both birth and adoption family I know found their desire to adopt when their three grandnieces were orphaned by an act of

domestic violence. This couple already had three biological sons and lived on a farm. The girls' grandmother was the wife's oldest sister by over ten years. The oldest of the orphaned sisters was only a few years younger than the adoptive parents' youngest son. Through an expanded family discussion, the adoptive parents made their choice to adopt the three sisters. Now these three girls once again have two parents as well as a very hard to describe constellation of grandparents. Afterall, the wife's oldest sister their biological grandmother and their adoptive aunt.

In all legal adoptions, there are only parents and children. Other family relationships all spin off this primary relationship of parent and child. Being a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, a sister, or brother only happens because of the primary parent child relationship. That's it. My brother and sister are my siblings because we share the same parents. My cousins are my cousins because our parents are siblings who share the same parents. We all are blessed with four or more grandparents because they are our parents' parents. The primary relationship that defines a family in law is parent-child. Even marriage exists legally for the primary support the parent-child relationship.

God has no grandchildren. We are God's children because God chose to adopt us. Being adopted by God did not change our nature. Unlike Christ, who is the "only begotten son" of God (John 3:16), we are not divine. Like Jesus, who was also the son of Mary, we are still human. These details about adoption lead me to question why we often call Pentecost "the birthday of the church." We are not Jesus, the Christ. We are brothers and sisters because he agreed to do what must be done for our Father to adopt us. God has no grandchildren. God has only Jesus, his only begotten son (John 3:16) and us, sons and daughters by adoption.

All families celebrate children's birthdays. Often adoptive families celebrate "Gotcha Day," the anniversary of the child being placed in their arms.<sup>1</sup> Pentecost is really a Gotcha Day, the anniversary of the day when after Christ completed the way for our redemption that He poured out the Holy Spirit and our Creator adopted us as His children. Friends, God planned to adopt you long before your biological parents conceived you. Through his incarnation and resurrection, Christ made the way for our adoptions to occur. And just as when the Holy Spirit poured out on Peter and those with him on that first Pentecost, so too the Holy Spirit has been poured out on us to

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<sup>1</sup> Ramstads do not celebrate Gotcha Day (July 20) because the Korean emphasis celebrating birthdays worked much better for us since all three children had birthdays but only one child has a Gotcha Day.

make us God's children. As children of the same Father, we are all members of the same family.

On Pentecost we celebrate adoption as a church family. This is different from our other many volunteer associations such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, Rotary, Masons, P.E.O., Lionesses, Moose, or Kiwanis. (I think I caught all voluntary associations represented in our church. Please let me know if I overlooked you.) We are a "church family" because when God adopted us we became family. Pentecost celebrates our shared Gotcha Day as children of the same Father.

One thing families who celebrate both Birth Days and Gotcha Days like to do is have cake with candles for Birth Days and something else with candles for Gotcha Days. The candles celebrate the years on both days. For our church family Gotcha Day, I propose that we use the donut. Taking a sweet, leavened bread and frying it in oil is a cooking technique that predates written recipes. We do not know who the first human was to realize that if you put a hole in the middle of the dough before frying it the dough will cook evenly with no raw dough in the middle. Nor do we know which pastor or Sunday school teacher first did an object lesson pointing out that the donut is the ideal representation of God's love for each of us because a donut is a perfect circle with no beginning or end. Finally, donuts make a great holder for a candle, a reminder of the flame that hovered over every head that first Pentecost.

Happy Gotcha Day! You're in God's family now!

Amen.