

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Romans 8:12-19
8th Sunday after Trinity
July 17th, 2016

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as son, by whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father! The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...”

You can perhaps imagine this picture... a young Jewish boy waiting at the door for his father to return home from work. He is anxious and a little scared. You see, the boy was playing with his father’s important tools and he broke one of them. Mother said earlier in the day, “Just wait until your father gets home.” And then, the boy sees his father walking up the path, getting closer to the door. He bolts out the door as quickly as possible and cries out, “Abba, Abba!” He runs into his father’s arms and cries out in Aramaic again, “Abba, Abba, Abba.” Father knows that something is wrong.

The child tells the father what happened. The father does not hold back his discipline nor does he hold back his forgiveness. For this is the picture of God with his children that St. Paul gives to all of us in this letter to the Romans. So beautiful and intimate is the family picture of a father... God... and his child... you and me. Words we use so often like love and relationship don’t really do justice to the picture Paul is painting in this text.

Trying to describe the kind of intimate relationship that God has with us in words is tough to do. The reason is our earthly relationships are tainted and faulty. Even the best relationships we have here are not perfect. They can’t be. Sin makes sure of it. When we think of our best and closest relationships we can still conjure up memories when life in that relationship was not the bed of roses we had hoped it to be. So, describing how close our relationship is with our Lord, is difficult to grasp.

There are two ways God describes relationships in the Bible. First is the “Father/Son” relationship. You know about these flesh and blood relationships. These are close and personal relationships – at least for most of us. But I have talked to many people... and you know them too... and maybe you are one of them... who knows that a good relationship doesn’t necessarily depend on flesh and blood – Father/Son or Mother/Daughter or Brother/Sister. Some people don’t have good relationships with whom we share the same genetics. Sometimes this is our own fault. Sometimes this is the fault of others. My brother and sister-in-law have three adopted children and there is no way you could convince them that they don’t have a close and personal relationship with their kids because they were born from different mothers and fathers. You know how these relationships work.

The second type of relationship is described most intimately by the Hebrew word, “Yadah”. This word means, “To know”. This is the “two becoming one flesh” relationship that we describe between a husband and a wife. This relationship is not so much as what you are born into as it is what you have been “adopted into”... “created”... “made to be.” And here in Romans, we have both of these relationships. We have the Abba Father relationship, and we have the “made fellow heirs with Christ”... the adoption, the “made one flesh together” relationship as well.

And you see, this is the baptismal identity that we have when God puts His name on us and calls us his very own. This is the identity that we heard about two weeks ago when Paul exclaimed that in Baptism we were therefore buried with Christ into death... and we were raised with Him as well. This “to know” or “Yadah” relationship is even more important and more intimate than the Abba/Father

relationship and we all know how important that is. This relationship is better because this doesn't depend on how you were born – it rather depend on Christ who has made you what you are... a co-heir with Him in the Kingdom... a fellow brother with Him in the family of God. And more than just family... a fellow inheritor of all things that belongs to God... life... forgiveness.

So, like the example of the Jewish boy who broke his father's tool and came running out to a "just" father who received him in his arms, disciplined him as you would expect, but then forgave him and loved him and never let go of him... so is our heavenly Father. But not all earthly fathers are like this boy's father. Some people are not born into these kinds of families. Some are born into hardship and instability. Some are born into abuse and dysfunction. Some of you can recall such moments or a constant refrain of what I am speaking about. As a matter of fact... at this very point in writing my sermon for this Sunday, a woman came in to the church with her story of hardship. It's not an uncommon story... not from those who come in to seek assistance. Her husband was the victim of a gang related crime, her children are turning against her. Her brother is in jail and she just got out of jail herself. Her mother passed away recently and she feels alone in this life. She works two jobs but is behind in her bills.

She admitted her mistakes. She confessed her guilt. She was not innocent and neither are you. It's true that sometimes trouble finds us in this cruel world. Sometimes, we are the ones who go out and seek the trouble. And beloved, if you want to find it, you will. Seek not these paths in life that lead to trouble – or that seek to cause trouble for other people for your own benefit. Repent and seek the Lord. Seek your Abba and run into His arms. And know, that before you can even begin to seek for yourself, God has already sought and found you.

This is why the picture of your relationship with your Lord is so special. We can't even fathom how magnificent our "Father/Son/Daughter relationship with our Lord... how special and how intimate. But then, our Lord shows us that we have even a better relationship with God than this. It's the "Yadah" relationship. It's the "one flesh" - inherit everything that God Himself has - relationship. It's so special and so close that it transcends our human understanding – check that – ALL understanding. He is in us and we are in Him. That's how we live and that's how we have eternal life. This is a love that knows no bounds. And you have it.

Even when times are bad and relationships falter, His relationship with us does not. We might wonder where he is as our Father and brother – as a God in one flesh with us – when times are too difficult to describe...but it is true that God does not forsake us in such times... nor has He left us. Take heart, beloved in the Lord, He keeps you and He sustains you. He is *with you always to the end of the age*, as He says. He is the one who makes the "relationship" that matters the most what it is: life giving and eternal.

So, with our heavenly Father, we call him the most intimate name there is – Abba. And He is the one who took that close relationship even one step further by sending His Son – our Lord – into the flesh... becoming one flesh... with us. There truly is a complete nearness in our relationship with God – even when we feel utterly alone. Take heart, beloved in the Lord, the Lord is with you and He makes us what we are... loved... forgiven... He in us and we are in Him. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows His righteousness right into our tattered lives. He knows forgiveness all the way to the grave for you. Thanks be to God. That is yours. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.