

## Online Worship 5/3/20 Fourth Sunday of Easter

Piano

As we move through the Easter season, we continue seeking to encounter the Spirit of God. God has sent the Spirit who is present and available for us to know and interact with.

Thanks to Sharri Hiller for stepping in and doing the service last Sunday. I'd had a rough couple of days the week before and when Nancy suggested getting someone to fill in, instead of saying, "No, I'm all right," I said, "O.K." I'm grateful for the help.

Word from our bishop and other leaders is that we need to continue doing online worship and not gather in person for a few more weeks at least. But again, we believe God is with us wherever we are. And we want to use technology the best we can to stay connected.

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.  
Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.  
Know that the Lord is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.  
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations. (Psalm 100)*

Hymn

*This Is My Father's World* #144

### Affirmation of Faith

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

### Prayer

If you have a prayer request you'd like to share, you can email me: [pastor@durantumc.org](mailto:pastor@durantumc.org) or go on the church website ([www.durantumc.org](http://www.durantumc.org)) and click on the Prayer tab.

Thanks again for your concern and prayers for me. I had tests at a neurologist's this week and should hear results tomorrow. I also have an appointment with a spine surgeon in a couple of weeks. They plan to give me injections that should help with the issues I have.

We keep praying for people who are isolated and lonely. We pray for everyone struggling with COVID-19. For healthcare workers, for researchers, for leaders who make decisions that affect us all. I pray for each of you that God will make his presence known and that you'll draw closer to the Lord. Let's keep praying for and reaching out to each other.

*Jesus, Remember Me* #488

Abba, loving and holy Father, we praise you. You are creator and Lord of all. You are highly exalted. Yet you want to be with us and you come to us. Thank you for all the ways you make your presence known in the world, in the church, in our lives. Thank you for the gift of your Spirit, dwelling in us so we can know you and experience your presence all the time.

Thank you that we can talk to you anytime about anything. We tell you now about our thoughts and feelings, our needs and struggles. We ask you to show us and tell us what you want us to know, how you are at work, what you expect us to do.

We're grateful that you hear our prayers for each other, for all who suffer, for all who work to relieve suffering, for all who make decisions and lead.

Receive our praise and worship from wherever we are today. As your children we pray now with confidence the prayer Jesus teaches us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

### Giving

You can give online: go to [www.durantumc.org](http://www.durantumc.org) and click on Online Giving. You can give by text: Text FUMCDURANT to 73256. Of course, you can mail a check: First UMC, PO Box 518 Durant OK 74702. Thank you.

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to*

*Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

*What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.  
(Galatians 3:26-4:7)*

*God Sent the Spirit*  
**Galatians 3:26-4:7**  
John Breon

Did you see the story a few months ago about a five year old boy named Michael going to the courthouse with his foster parents for an adoption hearing? He found a group of surprise visitors waiting. His entire kindergarten class was there. Michael's teacher, Mrs. McKee, got the idea when she encountered Michael's foster mom dropping him off at school. The two of them devised a plan, and McKee organized the field trip, bus and all.

In the year or so that Michael had been with the couple, his father said he was amazed at how often other children welcomed Michael into their homes and social circles. The highlight of the day was during a portion of the hearing where the judge, who'd never hosted an entire kindergarten class before, asked the students to explain why they were there in support. They all gave touching answers like, "I love Michael" and "Michael is my best friend"

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2020/january/kindergarten-class-shows-up-for-adoption-hearing.html>).

The apostle Paul says that God sent Jesus to redeem us and adopt us into God's family. And God has sent the Holy Spirit to live in us. The Spirit enables us to call God "Abba, Father," and to know that we are God's children and heirs.

Let's explore what that means and how the Holy Spirit helps us live as God's children, members of God's family.

Paul wrote this letter to a group of churches, various communities of Christians, who were in danger of being led astray from the gospel and true faith. These were mostly Gentile believers. A group of believers with a Jewish background were trying to convince the Gentiles that they needed to become Jewish in order to be fully Christian. Paul strongly opposed this teaching. He fires off several arguments against it in this letter.

He wants to let these new Christians know that faith in Jesus, trust in the faithfulness of Jesus and his cross and resurrection, is all that's necessary to be accepted by God. The grace of God is the only basis for salvation, for a relationship with God.

In the section we're reading, Paul reminds them that in the Messiah Jesus they are all children of God through faith. All who are baptized into Christ are clothed with Christ. "In Christ" is one of Paul's favorite ways to talk about Christian believers. Our identity is in Jesus. We are connected to him. He's the atmosphere, the environment, the ecosystem we live in spiritually.

Christians have been swallowed up into Christ so that they live in him and out of a relationship to him. To be "in Christ" is to be in spiritual fellowship with him through God's Spirit. (Scot McKnight, *Galatians. The NIV Application Commentary* 202)

Cultural, social, and sexual distinctions are not done away with, but they're covered in Christ. They're irrelevant as far as our worth and acceptance with God. "For you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Jews and Gentiles who belong to Christ are true children of Abraham. Remember, he was the first father of the Israelites. But in Christ we are all his children and heirs. The promises God made to Abraham come true for us in Jesus.

Then Paul uses an illustration about people who are to inherit from their parents. It's like if parents put money or property in a trust for their children and set a certain age when the children can take possession of it. Until that time, even though the child owns the whole estate, the child doesn't have access to the inheritance and can't use it. In the first century Roman world Paul lived in, the underage heir was no better than a slave, even though they owned it all. Guardians and trustees had charge of the heir until the time the father had set.

As long as people lived under the law as a means of relating to God, they were like those underage heirs. This was true for Jews and Gentiles. For Jews, the Law of Moses was like the guardian or trustee that oversaw how they lived. For non-Jews, various moral laws or superstitions or spiritual forces kept them in bondage.

But the time finally came to enter into and possess the inheritance. It was the time God had set. It was time for people to enter into their maturity. I remember sometime I was probably in high school. I overheard my parents talking. I realized they were talking about me. I didn't hear all of the conversation, but I did hear Dad say, "The boy's growing up." That made me feel good. There came a point when God said that it's time for Israel and, really, all people to grow up.

And when that fullness of time came, God sent his Son. God the Son, who shared the Father's eternal glory and being, entered into the world in Jesus of Nazareth. He was born of a woman. He became fully human, he took on and shared our humanity. He was born under the law so that we would no longer live under the law. God's Son came to redeem us, to set us free from all slavery and bondage—to whatever held us captive.

The purpose was that we could become God's children. Paul uses another illustration here from the culture he lived in. In that time and place, the father ruled the family and only sons could be heirs. The NIV translates literally here, "that we might receive adoption to sonship." What Paul is

saying is that God sent his Son so that we might become sons of God. He goes on, "Because you are God's sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." This isn't talking about maleness or masculinity. It's about the status of being a true child and heir. It's an analogy from the culture when Paul was writing.

The point is that God sent his Son into history to redeem us and make us his children. Now that we are children of God, God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to confirm that we're God's children and to enable us to call God Father.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God's Son. Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us (Gal 2:20) comes to live in us through the Holy Spirit. Again we see the Trinity at work in salvation. God initiates salvation. Jesus the Son puts it into effect through his death on the cross. The Holy Spirit enables us to appropriate it and experience it for ourselves as we participate in the Spirit (Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* 401).

God sends his own Spirit into our hearts, into the core of who we are. The Holy Spirit dwells in us in the place where we make decisions, where we do our thinking, where our feelings arise. Our heart governs who we are and what we do. And we can know personally and intimately the personal presence of God in our heart—empowering us, guiding us, filling us, flowing through us.

When we get nervous about the Holy Spirit, it's often because we're not sure what the Spirit might do or where the Spirit might take us. But we can know that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus who loves us, the Spirit of God whom we trust. I read this just the other day:

And as he invites us simply to ask God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus also reminds us of something vitally important: God is safe. If we ask God to give us the gift of the Spirit, we cannot know what will result. How will we be touched and changed? How will our lives be affected? Will the Spirit come quietly, like the gentle whisper heard by Elijah on the mountain, or dramatically like at Pentecost? What gifts will the Spirit bring, and what will he call us to be and do? We have no way of knowing, no way of controlling the Spirit or determining

how the Spirit will deal with us. But this we do know: God can be trusted. Our heavenly Father loves us more than we can ever imagine, and will only ever give us what is good, what will bring healing and wholeness into our lives. Whatever the Spirit brings into our lives—however unexpected, however uncomfortable—we can be sure it will be good. (Chris Webb, *Becoming Like Jesus: Spirit Filled Life*, [https://renovare.org/articles/becoming-like-jesus-spirit-filled-life?utm\\_source=Facebook&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=Renovar%C3%A9&utm\\_content=Articles&fbclid=IwAR0kANekZCG3STslzTdkjHWy6U6fsqITn2Bep1nLxsO1nRkNFINcObxU0Qk](https://renovare.org/articles/becoming-like-jesus-spirit-filled-life?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=Renovar%C3%A9&utm_content=Articles&fbclid=IwAR0kANekZCG3STslzTdkjHWy6U6fsqITn2Bep1nLxsO1nRkNFINcObxU0Qk))

One of the first things the Holy Spirit does for us is to let us know that we are God's children and no longer slaves. An adopted son in the Roman world had all the rights and privileges as a son born into the family. As children of God, we will inherit all that God promises. One way the Spirit shows us this is by enabling us or prompting us to call God, "*Abba*, Father." *Abba* is the Hebrew and Aramaic word for father. Aramaic was the language spoken in Palestine in the time of Jesus, so it's the language Jesus spoke. *Abba* is a term of intimacy and respect. It's what little children call their daddy, but it's also what adult children call their father. And "*Abba*" was the characteristic way Jesus addressed God. Think of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father...." Think of Jesus praying in Gethsemane: "'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will'" (Mark 14:36).

Jesus invites us to share his language of prayer, his way of talking with God, his relationship with God. What grace! The Holy Spirit in us makes it possible for us to cry out to God, "*Abba*!" The Spirit enables us to know God that closely. God is not distant and angry, but God is *Abba*—loving, close, wanting the best for us.

What will it do for our praying when we realize that we're children of a God like that? We can have conversation with the Lord God. I haven't told a Charlie story in a while. If you don't know, Charlie is our two-and-half-year-old grandson. He and his mom have been Facetiming with us every day for a few weeks. Sometimes Rachel will be trying to tell us something



and Charlie will start making loud noises. She'll tell him, "You need to be quiet because we're having a conversation." That's something Rachel and Zach tell him when they're trying to talk to each other. One day talking with us, she told him that, and Charlie said, "Me have conversation." He wants to be in on the conversation. That's what the Holy Spirit allows and enables us to do with God.

Recently I was reading about the experience a man had in a retreat. He was guided to read the story of Mary receiving word that she would give birth to the Messiah. After hours of reading the story over and over, this man finally got an insight, a word for him. As he shared it in his book, I heard it for myself. After Gabriel explained to Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and God's power would overshadow her and she would give birth to the Son of God, she said, "Let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:35-38) (James Bryan Smith, *The Magnificent Journey*).

Mary's response to the angel has become my response to the Lord. I've been praying it daily and more than once daily: "Let it be with me according to your word." That's a Holy Spirit kind of prayer. We can trust God and surrender to God that way. You can talk to Abba that way and trust that he'll do what's best. He'll give what we need.

So the Holy Spirit in our hearts causes us to call God Abba, Father and lets us know that we are truly God's children. And Paul points out that we get to inherit what God has promised. That is freedom, forgiveness, new life, power for living, purpose, direction, and ultimately the new creation and life forever in God's presence.

I came across a great story. Jay Speights recently discovered that he is royal. He took a DNA test and the results popped up as being of royal descent. The funny thing is that Speights grew up in New Jersey. He lives in an apartment. He doesn't even own a car. But now he's a prince.

NPR reports that he visited his long-lost country and was welcomed home as royalty. Another paper reported, "When he first arrived, he saw what looked like a festival, hundreds of people dancing and playing instruments and singing. It took him several minutes to realize it was a welcome party—for him." Here's an excerpt from his interview on NPR:

Steve Inskeep (host): Royal DNA? Mr. Speights is a prince in the small West African country of Benin. His family had been trying to learn the African side of their lineage for decades, and at last, he had an answer. So naturally, he got on a plane.

Speights: Next thing you know, I'm in Benin, being crowned as a prince. It was that easy.

Inskeep: The royal family prepared a festival for his homecoming. They hung up banners. They held a parade. And because the prince had no experience with prince-ing, the royal family sent him to a so-called prince school. (David Greene and Steve Inskeep, "Maryland Man Submits DNA and Discovers He's a Prince," NPR Morning Edition (3-6-19); <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2019/july/man-discovers-he-is-prince.html>)

Do you know that you're redeemed, set free, by God's grace in Jesus Christ? Have you become a child of God through faith in Jesus? Do you know that the Holy Spirit is in your heart, making real all that Jesus came to provide, making you a child of God and an heir of God's glory? Now's the time to enter into God's family and find a heritage and a destiny better than being a prince or princess. You can be a true child of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Hymn                      *Freely, Freely*                      #389

Benediction

*Go Now in Peace*                      #665