

## “ADOPTED INTO GOD’S FAMILY”

Romans 8:12-17

At its simplest, faith is taking God at His word. I believe that God created the universe and all life in six ordinary days, because the word of God states, **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,”** Genesis 1:1. I believe that I am saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ and not by my own works or merit, because the word of God states, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast,”** Ephesians 2:8-9.

From the Virgin Birth to the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ; from the fall of man into sin to the fall of Jericho; from Noah’s ark to the Ark of the Covenant; from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day; I may not see these realities with my eyes or understand them with my mind, but I believe them in my heart, because God has revealed these truths in His word. And at its simplest, faith is taking God at His word.

This is certainly true of the teaching about the Holy Trinity. The word “trinity” or “trinity” is not found in the Bible; however, “trinity” accurately describes the Triune God revealed in the Bible. For example, in Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** Or as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13:14, **“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”**

Three distinct Persons in one true God. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. And yet there are not three Gods but one Triune God. Do I understand this mystery? No. Frankly, what kind of God would God be if I could fully comprehend Him with my puny human intellect? God is infinitely above my puny human intellect, and says so Himself in Isaiah 55: **“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”**

Or as Paul wrote in Romans 11: **“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.”**

No, our role is not to understand the Trinity, but rather to praise the Triune God of our salvation; as did the seraphs in Isaiah 6, **“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.”** Our role is to praise the Triune God as did the writer of Psalm 150,

who said, **“Praise the LORD. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens. Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness.”** To quote from the Athanasian Creed, p. 53 in the forepart of our hymnal: “We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance.”

God the Father. God the Son. God the Holy Spirit. This is not only the language of the Trinity; it is also the language of family. The Son was begotten of the Father in eternity. The Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son in eternity. And in today’s text, the apostle Paul teaches us how we became a part of God’s Family through the power and work of that same Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:12-17. **“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.”**

What did you notice about these words from Romans 8? You may have noticed the mention of all three Persons of the Holy Trinity: **“Abba, Father”** in verse 15; **“Christ”** in verse 17; and the **“Spirit of God”** in verses 13, 14, 15, and 16. Or, you may have noticed the many references to family: **“Sons of God,”** verse 14; **“Spirit of sonship,”** verse 15; **“God’s children,”** verse 16; **“if we are children,”** verse 17; and also in verse 17, **“heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”**

And central to this family language is verse 15, **“You received the Spirit of sonship.”** The Greek word translated as “sonship” is *HUIOTHESIS*, and literally means “the placing of sons.” Placing someone into a position of sonship who was not a son before. In other words, adoption.

Scripture contains many descriptions of our new life in Christ; what we were by nature and what we became through faith in Jesus. Once blind, now seeing. Once deaf, now hearing. Once dead, now living. Once lost, now found. Once darkness, now light. But of all these descriptions, my favorite is adoption; and this because I myself was adopted.

My birthday is March 28. But until her death in 2008, my mother never failed to call me on June 12. “Happy birthday,” she’d say. And I’d reply, “Mom, it is not my birthday.” And

she'd answer, "Well, it's your second birthday to me. Today is the day we brought you home from the orphanage."

On June 12, 1953, after I'd spent two and a half months at the Children's Home Orphanage in Tampa, Florida, my new adoptive parents took me home. And on that day my dad said to me—no, I do not remember the words but have heard the story countless times: **"Pack your suitcase, son. We're going home."**

I've thought about these words many times over the years; about everything that one selfless, loving act of adoption meant to me and brought to me over my life: a home when I had no home; a name when I had no name; an inheritance when I had no inheritance; a family when I had no family. All of us received far greater blessings when we were adopted into God's Family through the work of His Spirit.

**First, our adoption into God's Family speaks clearly of God's undeserved grace.** Do you realize how privileged and blessed you are to be part of God's family; that you could never have come to God on our own? In our second reading today from John 3:1-17 we heard Jesus tell Nicodemus, **"You must be born again."** To paraphrase, Nicodemus said, "How can I do that?" Jesus said, "You can't, Nicodemus. New birth comes from the Holy Spirit."

The reality of being adopted into God's Family teaches the same truth: God's grace. I did not choose my adoptive parents; they chose me. I didn't tell my dad, **"Pack your suitcase. We're going home."** He said those words to me. I didn't know who Paul and Carol Weis were. I didn't know what they wanted. I didn't know where they were taking me. At two-and-a-half months old, my only contribution to the adoptive process was to lie in my crib, wide-eyed, slobber-mouthed, and wearing a messy diaper.

Over the years I've startled many people with my openness about adoption. Early in my ministry, a well-intentioned elderly woman took me aside after the service and whispered, "Pastor, that was a good sermon; but should you really have mentioned, well, um, you know, your adoption?" I understood. For years adoption carried a certain stigma: the unplanned pregnancy, the illegitimate child.

But I have never been ashamed of my adoption, and let me tell you why. Of all the babies in that orphanage, my parents chose me. The choosing was theirs. The benefits were mine. Choosing me meant they wanted me. While birth can be the result of an 'accident,' adoption is not. Adoption is always a deliberate choice. This is why the Bible describes our new life in Christ as both "rebirth" and "adoption".

You were adopted too; adopted by the Holy Spirit. This is not speculation. This is written in the word of God. And at its simplest faith is taking God at His word. Jesus said in John 15:16, **"You did not choose Me, but I chose you."** Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:3-4,

**“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.”**

Think of all the times you’ve felt worthless, unloved, unwelcome, and unwanted. The mailbox is empty. The phone never rings. Visitors never come. Birthdays are forgotten. Anniversaries go unnoticed. You tell yourself over and over, “No one wants me. No one remembers me. No one cares about me.” And you could not be more wrong, because God loves you. God wants you. God has proven this not only by the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, but by adopting you into His Family. His choice, not yours.

Suppose you got up every morning, saying, “I am a child of God, not a child of destiny. God wanted me. God chose me. God adopted me.” Would this make any difference to your life, marriage, ministry, career, or self-esteem? The apostle Paul saw this view of God as the power that transforms us from mere copers to more than conquerors. He went on to write in Romans 8: **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** Remember this equation the next time you lie sleepless in bed or struggle with a relationship or worry about the economy.

**Second, through our adoption into the Family of God, we’ve also come to know God as our ‘Abba, Father.’** Those of you who’ve known me for a while also know how I feel about my father, Paul Weis. Few people have had such a profound impact on my life. He always loved me; always provided for my needs; always disciplined me when I misbehaved; always lifted me up when I fell. And I fell a lot.

He is the man who made me study Luther’s Small Catechism; the man who built me a boat; the man who taught me how to ride my bike; the man who drove from Florida to Wisconsin to attend my high school graduation, got a speeding ticket along the way; and even slept in his car to save money. He is the man who in my estimation could fix everything from a broken toilet to a broken heart. I was blessed to have him; for in him I glimpsed the meaning of having a Father in heaven.

And you and I do have a Father in heaven; one who loves us, provides for us, defends and protects and disciplines us in a perfect way that no earthly father can. Have you ever counted the number of times Jesus used the expression “your Father in heaven” within His Sermon on the Mount. When Jesus taught us not to worry, He said, **“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them,”** Matthew 7:31-32.

When Jesus taught us to love even our enemies, He said, **“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He**

**causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous,”** Matthew 5:44-45.

When Jesus taught us to pray, He said, **“This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven,”** Matthew 6:9. Martin Luther explained the importance of the introduction to the Lord’s Prayer this way: “God would by these words tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

Notice what Paul wrote in verse 15 of our text: **“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”** The word “Abba” is Aramaic. Its meaning is exactly as it sounds: “Abba. Da-da. Dad.” This is how you’ve come to know God the Father through Jesus Christ and by being adopted by the Spirit of God. You know Him no longer as an angry Judge but a loving Father. What a difference this should make to your prayers and to your life, even the hardships and heartaches. As in the beautiful hymn: “What God ordains is always good. He is my Friend and Father. He suffers naught to do me harm, though many storms may gather. Now I may know both joy and woe. Someday I shall see clearly that He hath loved me dearly.” LH 521:4.

**Third and finally, when the Holy Spirit adopts us into God’s Family, He gives us the Family traits.** Despite the fact that I am adopted, I’ve heard countless time, “Why, you look just like your dad.” Even my wonderful stepmother recently told me: “Mark, the older you get, the more you resemble your father.” I countered, “That’s because all old men look remarkably the same after a while. Little hair. Big nose. Long ears.” How can I look like my father when I’m adopted? Yet, isn’t this the reality of our Father in heaven? Don’t we grow to look more and more like Him—no, not in appearance, but in behavior and character? Paul wrote to the Ephesians: **“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love,”** Ephesians 5:1. Children want to imitate their parents. More than once I said, “When I grow up, I want to be just like my dad.”

One summer Fred Craddock, a professor of Homiletics at Emory University and a renowned lecturer was vacationing with his wife in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. The two were enjoying a meal together in a quaint restaurant, when they noticed a distinguished, white-haired man moving from table to table, conversing with diners. “I wonder who that is,” Craddock’s wife whispered. “I have no idea,” Craddock said, “but I hope he doesn’t come over here.”

Of course, the man did come to the Craddock’s table and introduced himself. “My name is Ben Hooper,” he said. “Where you folks from?” Craddock replied, “We’re from Oklahoma.” “Nice state,” the man said, “though I’ve never been there. What do you do?” Craddock explained his role as a professor of homiletics. “Really?” the man said. “So you teach preachers

how to preach?” Craddock nodded. “Good,” the man said, “cause I have a story to tell you.” And to Craddock’s dismay, the man pulled up a chair and sat down.

“I’m from these parts,” the man said, “just across those mountains. When I was born, my mother wasn’t married. Growing up as an illegitimate child was tough. My classmates had a nickname for me—not a nice one either. Their taunts and ridicule hurt me so deeply that I usually spent recess and lunch by myself.”

“Weekends were the worst,” the man continued. “When I went to town on Saturdays, everyone stared at me. Everyone wanted to know who my father was. Sundays were bad too. I was a regular at church, but always tried to arrive late and leave early. Then the church got a new pastor. And one Sunday the new pastor said the benediction so fast I had no time to slip out. I got stuck walking out with the crowd, with everyone whispering and staring like usual.”

“I was nearly at the door when I felt a large hand clasp my shoulder. ‘Well, who are you, son?’ asked the new pastor. ‘Whose boy are you?’ My heart sank at that hated question. It seemed to me as if the pastor himself were joining in the ridicule. I felt tears pooling in my eyes and looked away. ‘Son?’ the pastor asked, gently prodding my shoulder. And when I looked up at him, he was grinning; and the grin became a wide, genuine smile of recognition. ‘Wait a minute,’ the pastor said. ‘I know who you are. I can see the family resemblance. You are a child of God. And God is your daddy.’ With that he patted me on the back, adding, ‘Son, with God as your daddy, you have a great inheritance. Now go and claim it.’

Looking at Craddock, the white-haired man said, “That was the most important sentence ever spoken to me in my life.” Then, excusing himself, the white-haired man walked away. As Craddock watched, a lump in his throat, he suddenly recognized the name Ben Hooper. Ben Hooper was a man of illegitimate birth, who had grown up to become the governor of Tennessee from 1911 to 1915.

**“Pack your bags, son. We’re going home.”** My dad said these words to me when I was adopted. When the time comes for us to go to our heavenly home, I suspect we’ll hear much the same from our Father in heaven: “Pack your suitcase. It’s time to go home.”