

“You Are Adopted”

Romans 8:14-17

Anne M. Cameron

June 7, 2009

Lake Highlands Presbyterian Church

In our scripture this morning, St. Paul reminds us of the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives today. . .

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ---if, in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

(Romans 8:14-17)

When we think of adoption, many things come to mind. Things from our own experience, things we read in the news, things we hear from friends or relatives who have adopted, or who have been adopted.

Their stories are of persistent patience, great giving, huge heartache, tremendous transformation. Their stories show us what it means for someone to freely take on care for another human being.

These all-too-human stories are of travel to foreign countries, bank accounts depleted, medical and educational challenges. . .

All we have are human words and human experience when we speak of God. The words St. Paul gives us today are words about adoption, and the words of John’s gospel are words of second birth, being born again. Both speak to us of newness in Christ.

Today we consider what it means to be adopted by God. When you come right down to it, the idea of God adopting us is preposterous. It’s outlandish. We, sinful human beings, adopted by the Holy God? It tells us something of the radical nature of God’s love for us. It tells us something of grace.

Adoption, in its human sense, certainly can mean different things. Adoption is not just about signing the legal papers and giving a child your name. A pregnant teen is mentored and taken in. A young man is coached and encouraged to improve his grades. Another is given a scholarship by an anonymous donor. An immigrant is given a home and helped to start a life here. All these are adoption, too.

Under the best of circumstances, *adoption transforms people*. It is easy to see how the adopted one changes. How the mentored one comes out of her shell. How the young person blossoms under careful tending. How the immigrant becomes a citizen. We remember a special parent or grandparent, a teacher, a coach. Someone who “took us under their wing” and gave us new life in some tangible, unforgettable way. Someone who gave us advice, or a place, or a helping hand, at just the right, moment. When we most needed it. Most of us have experienced such small moments of adoption. I for one believe God has a hand in these moments.

When we think about adoption, it is easy to think about self-giving love.

There is a child who desperately needs care. And there is someone who needs to give. That’s the thing about adoption. The adopted one is not the only one who changes. There is an *incredible vulnerability* in this act of self-giving. There is an amazing leap of faith that moves toward the future. And there is self-giving love that welcomes the “other one” into the family, for better or for worse---not just to be treated like family, but to BE family.

My friends Jill and Jon dreamed of having children for many years, but were unable. Eighteen years ago they adopted Peter and Michelle, orphans from Rumania. Their professional lives were turned topsy turvy as they began their family life with their newborn boy and toddler girl. They were excited---full of life and dreams. There were medical challenges. They already knew Michelle had serious developmental problems. But they were courageous and forward looking.

However, life threw them a terrible curve ball when Jon came down with cancer just two years after they brought their babies home. He died, that same year, at age 49. The children were 3 and 4. Jill has been a single parent ever since.

I daresay there have been many, many times over the past 14 years when Jill felt abandoned. Abandoned by Jon, abandoned by God. And yet we are told God’s spirit is a spirit that will not let us go.

St. Paul tells us the Spirit takes part in **our adoption**. God’s spirit steers us into new relationship. We become children of God, brothers and sisters to Christ. We look forward to the future God has promised. We revel in the love God freely offers.

When we are taken in by God, we get to relate to God on intimate terms. We get to call God “Daddy” or “Mommy”. We are, in fact, born again. Amazingly, we get to call Jesus “brother”.

We are all part of this adopted family. No boundaries. You and I are part of this strange, mystical family where everyone is the same. Nobody’s a birth child, nobody’s a favorite or a firstborn. Nobody’s the baby of the family.

Nobody deserves to be brought into this family of God, everybody just is.

No more competition. No more scrambling to achieve. No more favorites. No more losers because everyone wins. No more dysfunctional relationships. No more failed love.

In this family, we are loved by the perfect parent, the one who does not let us down, the one who loves us no matter our faults, no matter our mistakes, no matter how troubled, how messed up, how unredeemable we may feel we are.

And in this family the Spirit of God takes hold of us, the Spirit that will not leave us orphans. The Spirit changes us and takes us places where we could not, indeed would not, otherwise go. The Spirit makes it possible for us to be peacemakers in a broken world, to let go of a past that binds us, to look to a future that awaits us. The Spirit makes it possible for us to turn from anger to agape, from hate to healing, from despair to delight.

Jill has had to go places where she would never have gone. Michelle is now 19. To put it mildly, Michelle has been very challenging for Jill. In some ways, she seems a lively young woman. And yet, Michelle cannot complete even the simplest task. Because she was malnourished and bound in a crib for most of the first 17 months of her life, Michelle's frontal lobe never developed properly.

Jill hangs in there. She loves Michelle. She continues to seek the best for her. She plans for her future. She and Peter, a spunky young man exploring where he will go to college, include Michelle in everything they do as a family. Because they ARE family. No matter what.

As remarkable as this is, this human story only scratches the surface of the depth of God's love for us. God loves us **more even than this**. Even when we are not OK. Even when we reject God and turn away, God waits.

Led by God's Spirit, we are not slaves, but free.
We are not fearful, but confident of our place in God's family.
We are not strangers, but family.

In a sermon by the famous theologian Paul Tillich, Tillich talks about the mystery of God's overarching love for us. Today I have been calling this adoption. Tillich calls it grace. I would like to share a part of Tillich's eloquent sermon with you today. I use the word "adopted" in place of Tillich's word "accepted". Here is what Tillich says. . .

"We cannot transform our lives, unless we allow them to be transformed by that stroke of grace. [The awareness of God's love] strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper

than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged...”

“Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks through our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying, “**You are [adopted]**. *You are [adopted, adopted]* by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you [and I] are [adopted].”¹”

By the spirit of the grace of God, may it be so. Amen.

¹ Paul Tillich, “You Are Accepted”, published in *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 1948.