

Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.¹⁷ 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. (Romans 8:14-17)

Is Your Family Perfect?

How many posts on Facebook did you “like” this week? How many pictures on Instagram? What were those posts or pictures about? I’m sure there are all kinds of things you might “like” on social media, but if what I see is any indication, a great many posts are about family life – our kids, our dogs, our vacations. Now if you’re one of those people who doesn’t use social media at all, this might shoot past you. But when you see a post about somebody else’s perfect kids graduating or getting married or celebrating some life event or achievement, how does it make you feel? Does it ever make you just a little bit jealous? Do you ever find yourself “liking” somebody’s pictures or videos just because you don’t want to be that petty person who’s too jealous to do so? What do you feel about your own family when you do that? On some level, I think social media leads us to put our own families under a microscope. What do we find? **Is your family perfect?**

We all want to have perfect families don’t we? Don’t we tend to believe that those people out there on social media all have them or at least, they’re a lot closer than we are? You know what? In a sinful world none of us can have a perfect family. When I talk to our most faithful members, people who love their children and strive to raise them the way God calls us to, you know what becomes clear? Their children are still sinners. Those parents are still sinners. Sin causes pain and sorrow. It causes conflicts in the most Christian families. It causes dysfunction and hurts communication. That’s true in my family and it’s true in yours.

But God has a solution for our families. It begins with recognizing that our family goes beyond the people who live in our house. It goes beyond the biological and marital relationships that we usually define as our family. Our true family is an eternal one. St. Paul speaks to us of family this morning: **“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.”** The NIV says “sons” here instead of “children” because in the ancient world daughters didn’t have inheritance rights. So the NIV is trying to make the point that whether you are a man or a woman, you have all the rights a son would have in God’s family.

How did that happen? We were adopted. Adoption is a one-way street. Parents decide they want a child so they go out and find one. Yes, I realize there’s enormous legal and bureaucratic machinery they have to wade through. But that only makes my point. They spend endless hours dealing with lawyers and social workers. They spend enormous amounts of money just so they can make that child their own – which means they are committing themselves to decades of laying out money and doing laundry and making meals and educating and loving that child. They will give the best years of their lives to meeting that child’s needs. And why? They owe that child nothing. It’s not their niece or nephew. It’s a stranger that they searched for and found and brought into their family.

That’s how God loved us. We were strangers but he brought us into his family. He chose us. He planned for us before the world began. He even asked his only real Son to pay for our adoption with his own blood. And as is often the case in adoptions, we brought a lot of baggage into the family – our sin. We turned God’s household upside down. In truth, it would’ve been easier for him to just leave us out in the cold. But he refused to do that. He chose to love us. To forgive us. To deal with us through all the decades of our lives and through all our bad choices and sins. We are now permanent members of his family.

Each member of the Holy Trinity played a part in adopting us. Paul says that being led by the Spirit makes us children of God. He’s talking about faith and the change it makes in us. Faith is simply trusting in Jesus. That trust makes us want to follow God with a Christian life. Now, sadly, down here, that’s a struggle because we’re all believers and unbelievers at the same time. Every pastor has doubts. Every Lutheran teacher is guilty of sin. Every Christian has moments when they question their faith or make sinful choices. That won’t change until we get to heaven. But we live in repentance. We know that Jesus died and paid for those sins and we trust that we are forgiven. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. He came to us in the message about Jesus

and created our faith. Paul says that he didn't give us spirit of fear. We don't live in terror of God slapping us down for messing up today. We have a spirit of sonship, of adoption. Faith makes us part of God's family even while the sin in our hearts tries every day to lead us out of that family.

St. Paul says, "**By him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'**" "Abba" is not a Swedish rock group. It's an Aramaic word. *Abba* is kind of like "daddy." It's what a son calls his father when he sits on his lap and enjoys the warmth of human contact. It's the word a daughter uses when her father reads to her and she has a question. *Abba* captures all the closeness of a child who trusts the love their father shows them every day. You know what amazes me about that, both in our families here and in our family in heaven? The child doesn't think about it. They don't say to themselves, "OK, this dad character carries me when I'm tired and reads to me when I'm bored and works all day so I can have my favorite foods and a nice warm bed to sleep in. He even buys me presents for my birthday. He's OK. I think I'll love and trust him." Long before a child could ever even put all those things together logically, he or she loves and trusts their father because that father's love touches them on a level so deep they don't even realize how much it has made them the person that they are.

That is what faith does to us spiritually. It connects us to the Father whose love for us never ends. It grasps that God knew us by name and loved us before the world began. It understands that God moved heaven and earth to give us a Savior to rescue us from sin and death and hell. It knows that our Father in heaven listens to every prayer we breathe and he loves to answer. It knows that God has nothing more important to do than to love his children and care for them in a dark and scary world. So we say, "Abba, Father, Daddy," when we're scared and when we're hurt and when we're alone. And our Father is always there.

St. Paul says, "**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.**" That is the promise. Since we are God's children, we are his heirs. St. Paul is thinking of a wealthy man with a large estate and lots of servants, even slaves who need to be supervised. Who do you trust to do that? That's a problem even today. In the ancient world, the logical choice was the rich man's heir. He had a vested interest in making the most of the property. By virtue of being the heir, he had an extra measure of authority. Especially as his father got older, the heir would take on more and more responsibility. The servants and the slaves had to obey his commands.

God calls us heirs not because he's going to die and we'll get whatever he will us. He calls us heirs to say that we have that special status. God's true heir, of course, is Jesus. Again and again, the Bible speaks of the authority Jesus has over all creation. But in an incredible act of grace, God the Father sits us next to Jesus as his heirs. God promises us the same kind of authority and glory that Jesus has. Now, when he says that, he is not denying that Jesus is our Lord or that we'll spend eternity praising and honoring him. But we're not slaves anymore. We've been adopted into his family. God has loved us like he loved Jesus and he honors us with a position we could never earn.

In fact, God asked his true Son to lay down his life to save us. Jesus did that. He died because we still have that sinner inside us that messes up our families and rebels against God's law. Jesus suffered hell on the cross because we sinners keep hurting the people we love most. Jesus paid for all that sin. He rose to tell us it is gone forever. That's the payment necessary to bring us into God's family. Then he and his Father sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we know that.

And so that we can look forward to eternity living in the only perfect family we will ever know. In heaven, all that's wrong with this life will be over – including the sin that makes us such disappointing parents and spouses and siblings and children. In heaven, we will be free from the sin that makes us damage our families here. And we'll finally see ourselves clearly as the family of God. In the resurrection, we will live in a new and perfect world where our families will only be a joy. And we'll all live as brothers and sisters in Christ. So even if we've broken our relationship with sibling or a parent here, if we share faith in Christ, we will be reunited with them in our perfect family.

That really is the hope of Christianity. I would like to stand up here and tell you that being a Christian means that you can have a perfect family here. But that's not what the Bible says – which actually gives me some comfort because as much as I've tried to be a good husband and a good father, I haven't even come close. As a result, my family is far from perfect. But St. Paul says that we will share Christ's glory if we share his suffering here. To follow Jesus into heaven, we have to go through life here. God never promises us an easy life here. He promises us pain. He promises us that sin will damage all that matters to us here. He promises us that the devil will never stop trying to hurt us – and every time he damages our family, he drives a spike into our

hearts. But it has to be that way because our true life isn't here. It's with Jesus. Sin has to hurt here because glory follows. It only comes in heaven.

But it is coming. And it will be worth all the hurt here. All of God's promises of love in Christ mean that God gives us the faith to endure the suffering here. God chooses which pain comes so that it we never have to face more than we can stand. He uses it to mold and shape our faith so that it carries us to heaven and that perfect joy. Now, God does hear our prayers and in love, he often does grant us relief and rich blessing here. But on this side of heaven, nothing is perfect. Hurt, even in our families, is part of the cross Jesus calls us to bear, part of the sufferings he endured to reach glory, part of our path to eternal life.

Knowing that Jesus won that life for us and that he hears and answers our prayers, does motivate us to work to heal our family life here. We dare not say, "Well, life in a sinful world is full of pain so there's nothing we can do." We live in hope of greater things to come. The Holy Spirit teaches us to find joy in God's love and then to express that joy in serving each other. So we comfort one another when life hurts and when our families are broken. We talk to each other and confess our sins to one another and forgive each other, especially in our families. We ask the people we know best and love best what they need. We do our bumbling best to give it. Will it be perfect here? No. But will it be blessed by God? Absolutely. In many cases, already here.

So don't let social media get you down. None of those families are perfect either. None of those parents or children or spouses are immune to what sin does to us. You have the family God gave you here. Love that family as God has loved you. Serve that family and pray for that family and forgive that family as Jesus has served and prayed for and forgiven you. Come to hear the gospel with that family so that God can constantly renew in you the gift of the Holy Spirit who gives you that spirit of sonship. And cling to each other and to your Savior until you get to heaven, and God makes all things perfect. Amen.