

## Children of God

Who are God's children?

What does it mean to be a child of God?

Can anyone join or is this an exclusive club?

A club made up of the faithful, the wealthy, those who never doubt...that kind of club? 'cos if so, I'm out.

In our first reading from the Old Testament, we hear the continuing story of the lineage of Abraham. Today it's the story of Jacob. Jacob was walking from Beer-sheba to Haran and as it was getting late, and the sun was setting, he stopped to rest for the night. He used a stone for a pillow and had a dream about a ladder with angels ascending and descending. Can you imagine? What a spectacular dream! Then God shows up, stands beside Jacob and says "see all this? As far as you can see now belongs to you. Your descendants shall keep this land and shall be numerous. And I will bless you and remain with you until my promise has been fulfilled." Then Jacob woke up and realised what this dream meant. He took the stone and made it a monument from his dream. I have to say, that's a pretty good dream to have.

Next, let's skip to the Gospel. Jesus is telling his followers another parable, this one about the weeds among the wheat. And like last week Jesus provides an explanation, which was not his usual process. Now, I have to tell you, I am not a gardener. If something flowers and looks pretty, I consider it a flower, not a weed. And I have no idea what invasive species look like.

Jesus' followers knew weeds. They didn't want them with the wheat and offered to remove them. Yet Jesus rightly tells them that they can't pull the weeds without disturbing the wheat. So Jesus will instruct the reapers to pull the weeds at harvest time and bundle them, then harvest the wheat and bundle it. The weeds will be burned in the fire. This sounds ominous.

Jesus then explains the parable. 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

This is easy enough to understand. The good sower is Jesus, the good seed are the children of God, the weeds are the children of the evil one, the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest represents the end of time. And the reapers are angels. We know that those who are children of God will be kept safe and honoured. The children of the devil will be thrown into the fire. And their eternity will be hot...hot like an Ontario summer. :-)

As a slight aside, do you know what gnashing of teeth is? I looked it up. Gnashing of teeth is clenching or grinding your teeth. Which means for the last 20 years or so I gnash my teeth as I sleep. Yuck. The phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is something that is written seven times in the Christian Scriptures which always refers to the end times and what will happen to the unrighteous. Um, I think I'm in trouble.

On a lighter note...let's go now to the epistle of Paul to the Romans.

I love Paul's use of language in his letter to the early church in Rome. He speaks of slavery and freedom, he speaks of adoption and belonging. He speaks of suffering and of revelation.

Paul writes, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption." Adoption in the best sense of the word...that you have been chosen. CHOSEN!

He goes on to write, "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". The image of us being children of God is one that has resonated profoundly with me throughout my life and especially in my ministry.

In fact, when I graduated from Seminary in 2007, I was given a cross with a passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians. "And because we are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father! (Galatians 4.6) The passage that was chosen for me came from my New Testament professor Dr. Dan Smith. He told me that he chose this particular passage because it reminded him of how I view my relationship both with God and with the world.

Paul goes on to talk about the trials we are enduring now and how they are nothing compared to the wonder that awaits us. He writes, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." We need to continue to endure the difficult time in which we live, knowing that, one day, we will be received into the next life where there is no fear, no hunger and no COVID-19.

Paul further writes "in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies". We will be freed from our bondage of sin and decay of the body to find ourselves given new life through our adoption as God's children. Our bodies, which are good only for this life and this world, will be discarded as we are redeemed of our sin and short-coming. When we reach the next life, we will not need these, or likely, any other body as we will be part of the body of Christ.

On my left inside wrist is tattooed the word "hope". I had it tattooed there, so that I could see it whenever I look at my wrist. It says "hope" rather than "love" because sometimes love is too difficult. Yet there is always hope. The kind of hope that Paul writes of to the Romans and again to the Corinthians. Paul writes "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience". I'm with you, up to the patience part. I try to be patient. But I find as I get older that I don't wait as well. I will distract myself, I will find something else to do, but to sit and wait, I'm not good at that. It is one of my many character flaws.

What Paul is telling us is that we were born of our parents, yet blessed by God before our birth, so that we would be born children of God. Paul reminds us that God does not have step-children; only birth children. The family of God is more than a biological family; it is a family of choice. Don't get me wrong, it's not easy to be a follower of Jesus. And yet, it is something so very worthwhile. As children of God, as followers of Jesus we commit to loving one another as much as we love God. We commit to loving our neighbours as much as we love ourselves. And we commit to loving our enemies. THAT takes practice and patience and a great deal of work. Yet we do. And we do that through hope, and through love.

Divine love is not something that is Disney and Hallmark inspired. It is dark and dirty, mucky and messy. It is adventurous and beautiful. It is profoundly deep and sacred.

Thus, as children of God we make a promise, a commitment to undertake being our very best selves, giving all of who we are, even when we aren't at our best. We give the very best of ourselves to love and serve. It's not easy, and at times, it's not fun. Yet this is what we do, this is who we are. A family. We are, together, children of God. Part of God's family. Just as loving and messy and dysfunctional and loud and soft and giving and losing and finding as any other family. A family of choice, based primarily on love. Thanks be to God.

Sunday 19 July 2020  
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Genesis 28.10-19a  
Romans 8.12-25  
Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43

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