

HOW FAMILIES WORK (SOMETIMES)

Re-rooting The Family Tree

Romans 8:14-17

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May 15, 2016

LISTEN: <http://fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/381838-re-rooting-the-family-tree-pentecost-sunday>

Does anyone here think your family is ideal? Most of us feel plenty of guilt about busyness and short tempers and harsh words. The pace of life is such that families may share the same dwelling but not share life. Someone told about a crossword puzzle clue: "What makes a home?" The answer was "furniture." Well, we know it's more than furniture, but how do we get there? Maybe you're one for whom the word family produces a bitter taste in your mouth. The concept of God as father is not positive. For some, home means something worse than furniture; it means pain. What if I told you that through God's Spirit, we can change our family's story and direction? Even change the root system of our family tree, so that we are not doomed to repeat family cycles of destruction. We are free to make new family stories.

To get at this truth, Paul uses the image of adoption. Read with me vv. 14-16. I wonder how many of us here today have been blessed with the adoption process. It's a powerful image that says, "We wanted you. You were chosen." Paul used it in writing to the Romans, because in the Greco-Roman culture, it was understood. In fact, Nero was adopted by Emperor Claudius so that Nero could inherit the throne. In John 3, Jesus chose the phrase "born again," while Paul, writing to a Roman audience, chose the image of adoption. Either way, the message is that we can replant the family tree in new soil. We can re-root it and create a new family heritage. The Holy Spirit can create family where there is none, and where there is one, the Spirit can strengthen it.

Think of it. God's Spirit makes us family. We get to call God what Jesus called him--Father. Jesus even taught this in his model prayer, "Our father..." And Paul uses an even more familiar name in v. 15, "Abba," the Aramaic word for daddy or poppa. Brennan Manning tells about attending a bar mitzvah at a synagogue. During dinner, the rabbi's four-year-old son got bored and started wandering around. He became disoriented, panicked and couldn't find his family. Suddenly, he spotted his dad and ran into his arms, shouting, "Ab...Ab...Abba!" [*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 243]. Indeed, the word for "cry" in v. 15 can be translated "shriek of delight." What a great picture of God's love for us, a four-year-old projectile, flying through the air, sure of his abba's love!

This is why we all need Christ. This adoption gives us a coherent sense of self, an identity, a sense of belonging. [Manning, p. 224]. Through our adoption in Christ, we know who we are and whose we are. We inherit this place of worth, not by our own merit, but by virtue of our position in Christ, by virtue of our relationship with Christ.

And God wants us to replicate this spiritual family in our earthly families. Think about Paul's words in our text. It's all about relationships. That's family. Thomas Lynch is an undertaker and author. He says he hears families say all the time, "Oh, Daddy didn't want to be any bother." "Well," says Lynch, "why shouldn't I be a burden to my family? They were a burden to me. A lovely burden, but a burden." [*The Good Funeral*, by Thomas Long and Thomas Lynch, p. 126]. I agree. Because my kids were a bother. All those messes from upset stomachs, and when they were driving age, the late night waiting up for them to come home. And the money it cost to raise them!" You see, love is about bother, messiness and sacrifice. Isn't that the message of the Cross?

God the Father models for us how to be family, when people are a bother. He leads; He doesn't "drive" (v. 14). Taking time for each other, loving each other, cultivating intimacy with each other. The writer Erma Bombeck once wrote a column entitled, "If I Had My Life To Live Over Again." In it she said, "I would invite friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded. I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains. There would have been more I love yous, more I'm sorrys, but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute, look at it and really see it, live it, and never give it back" It's all about relationships...ours with God in Christ, and with each other.

"And it is this very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." (v. 16). Replanting the family tree in God's soil. This is Pentecost Sunday, a reminder that the Risen Christ is present among us to do what we cannot do on our own. And remember. The Holy Spirit doesn't just indwell super saints, but also ordinary and imperfect people, as well as ordinary and imperfect families.