

KIDS BELONG

Texts: Romans 8:14-17
Matthew 18:1-5

- I. Introduction
 - A. Paul says “we are children of God.”
 1. And our first reaction may be something like “Yeah, we know. So what?”
 2. We are so familiar with that phrase that it can easily lose its meaning.
 3. We’ve heard it since we first started going to Sunday School, a lot of us.
 - B. But I figured on “Kids Belong” Sunday, it might be a good time to revisit what that really means. Because if we really are all supposed to be the “kids” of God’s Kingdom, it might be necessary to figure out what that looks like, and what we need to do to help bring about that reality.
- II. So what does Paul have to say about the fact that we are children of God? What are some of the implications of that?
 - A. First, he says that we are all adopted. Did you know you were adopted?
 1. And Paul knew what that word meant—in the Roman culture of his time, it was much like it is today—it was not unusual for a child to be born to a mother or a family that for whatever reason weren’t able to keep that child. Back then, it was usually for economic reasons (again, not unlike today).
 2. And when a new family adopted a child, that child had full rights as a full member of its new family.
 3. So when Paul says we are adopted by God, he was making the point that as adopted children, we have full rights as a part of God’s family.
 4. So ponder that one for a minute—what does it mean to have full rights as a member of God’s family?
 - a) To quote the American Express people, it’s almost hard to comprehend all of the benefits that come with membership.
 - b) In fact, few verses later in Romans 8, Paul writes those well-known words that attempt to comprehend what it’s like to have full rights as a member of God’s family.
 - c) He says, “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor

powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God (our Father).

d) If that's what we are promised as members of this family, if that's how much our adoptive Father loves us, it's hard to imagine why anyone would turn down the opportunity to be adopted by God.

B. And since we are adopted by God into God's family, there are other implications also—beginning with the fact that this gives us a close and intimate relationship with God our adoptive parent.

1. The clue here is when Paul says that we are to address God as “Abba!”

a) As I've said before when we heard Jesus call his father “Abba” in the gospels, in the Bible, Abba is not the name for a Swedish rock group.

b) It actually an Aramaic word (Aramaic being the spoken language of the time in Palestine, the language that Jesus and the disciples would have spoken)

c) And the only way to translate “Abba” is “Daddy”. For it means “father”, but at an intimate and personal level.

d) And as you may remember, Jesus was known to address his Father that way once in a while.

2. Do any of you ever begin your prayers by saying something like “Daddy God”?

a) It sounds a little silly at first, until we realize that if we really have been adopted by God, then perhaps we should address Him by that name at least once in a while.

b) For to be a true adopted child of God, suggests that level of intimacy and familiarity.

C. In today's passage, Paul also talks about an inheritance that we receive as members of his family. And not only that, he says we are joint heirs with Christ. In other words, as co-children of God with Jesus, we get what Jesus got, too.

1. I picture a scene like we've all seen in movies when a will is read and everyone gathers around in a room to hear it.

2. The difference in this scene is that those hearing the will being read include us and all of those around us this morning, and all the saints who have gone before us, etc, etc. In other words, it's going to have to be a really big room.

3. And when the will is read, what we find out is that ultimately, we all get the same thing, and we're all okay with that, because what we get is so incredible—the gift of eternal life with our father.
 4. And that's not all. When I've read that verse over the years, I've always thought it's somewhat unfortunate that when we hear the word “inheritance”, we automatically think of material things like money or property, or stocks—things like that.
 5. And that's not our fault, that's the way our system usually operates.
 6. When it comes to God passing down his inheritance, I always think the better word might be “legacy”. A “legacy” isn't necessarily material stuff, it can be the qualities that someone has that they pass down to their children.
 7. So now ponder what it means that God has passed his qualities—things like love and grace and forgiveness and mercy—down to each of us.
 8. How cool is that? And maybe a little scary too, to think that as joint heirs with Christ, we have been willed this great legacy from our father God.
 9. Because what it also implicit in Paul's words is that we aren't allowed to keep this legacy to ourselves.
 10. So apparently there are also certain responsibilities for us as the adopted children of God—namely not just to accept the legacy we have been given, but to share it with others.
- D. And even beyond that, apparently according to verse 17, if we really are joint heirs with Jesus, that means it's not just about sharing in the glory, but sharing in the suffering.
1. Again, I picture a scene like we've seen on TV or the movies, when someone inherits a huge amount of money and they build this great mansion and wall it off from the outside world.
 2. That's not what's it like when we have received our inheritance from God. If anything, we are called to engage in the world even more, and instead of building walls, we may need to knock down some walls that have kept us from doing that, rather than wall ourselves off and try to keep it all to ourselves.
 3. And even beyond that, to know that as the adopted children of God, it does not make us immune from suffering.
 4. If the experiences of Jesus teach us nothing else, it is that--that as joint heirs with Christ, it does not let us off the hook from having to bear the cross in some way once in a while.

5. And even beyond that, this idea that we are to share God's legacy of love with the world, and that we are all joint heirs with Christ, that means that when anyone suffers, we all suffer. Isn't that what it's like in our earthly families? Anyone who has experienced the pain of a family member can speak to the personal pain that comes from that. That's just what it means to be a part of a family. And being a part of God's family is no different.

- III. All of this is why this reading is so important on Kids Belong Sunday, when we recognize those children in our community who are struggling, those who need good homes, those who need good parenting, those who need love, those who need us in some way. As joint heirs with them, as co-children of God's family, we really have no choice but to reach out in some way and help. And there are so many kids who through no fault of their own don't belong, who fall through the cracks of our society, who fall through the cracks of the system. Watch this video that gives some of the realities of the situation.
 - A. Even beyond the ministries of foster and adoptive parenting, there are ministries in our community such as MAP and Family Promise that reach specifically out to children and families in an attempt to help kids belong.
 - B. And even if we aren't all called to be adoptive or foster parents, there is still much we can do to support those who are. There are respite programs and clothing banks for foster families to supply the needs of kids when they come into a family with very little notice. Janice Hilleary and other of our foster and adoptive parents in our congregation can be resources who can tell you what opportunities are available for all of us.
 - C. If you attend the event next Saturday, you will learn what opportunities are available as well.
- IV. Conclusion—So...What exactly is it that empowers us to be the kind of adopted children that God calls us to be, what is it that empowers us to do all we can to make sure that all kids belong in our community and world? A couple of things from the scriptures today:
 - A. Paul says it is the Spirit of God working in us and through us that empowers us to truly be the children of God.
 1. Of all the ways that I've heard the Spirit of God described over the years, in terms of today, one stands out.
 - a) It is especially for those times when we are tempted to act like anything but a true child of God, or even at those times when we've given in to those temptations in whatever ways.

- b) Here is the description--It is when God's Spirit is that little voice within us at those times that says, "You are God's child. Now behave like one."
- c) I think I remember my mother saying something similar to me more than once when my brother and I were sitting next to her in church and messing around with each other.
- 2. That is kind of what Paul is saying in Romans 8—In the end, the true test of whether we are Spirit-filled, Spirit-driven adopted children of God is whether we behave like one.
- B. And the other way we are empowered is through those words of Jesus that we heard in the first reading—"When you welcome one of these children because of me, you welcome me."
 - 1. If we needed another reminder that we are joint heirs with Christ, and co-brothers and sisters with him in God's family, there it is.
 - 2. When we reach out so that even one more child truly belongs, we are reaching out to him.
 - 3. When we bring them in to the family, we are bringing them into Jesus' family as well.
 - 4. And when we make sure they belong to the family of God, we do so because as Jesus says, in God's family, they come first.
- C. So what a gift it is to be the adopted children of God. What a gift it is to be a joint heir with Christ of all that goes with it—both the blessings and the responsibilities.
- D. And what a gift it is to be a member of a family that includes all the children of our community.
- E. And what a gift it is to be able to reach out and welcome them into the family in the ways in which God calls us.