

TEXT: ¹⁴ 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.

We are Children of God

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Jackie and I just returned from Wisconsin. We were in Madison, WI to attend the wedding of our son, Jared, to his fiancée, Kimberly Beck, daughter of Keith and Dorothy Beck, members of our WELS church in Middleton, WI., St. Andrews Lutheran Church. The wedding was at the WELS chapel on the campus of the University of Wisconsin at 4:00 on Sunday afternoon. I thought I’d share a picture of the family with you this morning since you don’t get to see many of the kids very often now that they’re all grown up and live in different parts of the country. (Family Picture from May 24, 2015 at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel in Madison, WI)

It’s such a blessing to be able to get together as a family at events like these because we don’t have that opportunity very often. The reason for that is because we all belong to another family, the Triune God’s family. This morning Paul reminds us that **We Are Children of God.** **1) We became part of the family by the work of the Holy Spirit. 2) As members of the family we have the privilege of coming to our Father in prayer. 3) As children of God we are heirs with Christ.**

1. We Became Part of the Family by the Work of the Holy Spirit

When we were born into this world physically to our parents, we were not children of God. No, we didn’t even want to be part of God’s family. God was our enemy, we thought. But the truth is, God made us in love and even though we were at enmity with Him, he still loved us and wanted us to be part of his family. But we did not have the spiritual power or will to make that happen. We became part of the family by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote, “...**those led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**” (v. 14) The Holy Spirit led us to faith in Jesus. When we became a believer in Christ, we were adopted into God’s family. God wanted us to be part of the family long before we were born physically to our parents.. Already in eternity God loved us and chose us to be his own. In eternity he chose to send his Son in the fullness of time to redeem the world. And then He sent the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith so that through faith we possess the righteousness and forgiveness Jesus secured for all.

How did the Spirit work to lead you to faith? It was not by chance that the Spirit worked in your life. Paul teaches this in his words to the Christians in Thessalonica. He wrote, “**From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.**” (2 Th 2:13) God chose us for a purpose (*eklegomai*). People do not come to faith by their own decision. We believe because God chose us to be his own. God brought us to faith in time because he chose us to be his own in eternity.

The Holy Spirit works through means. He has worked faith in us through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, that is, Baptism. God the Father carries out his will to save us by using the means of grace to bring us to faith. Jesus taught, “**No one comes to Christ unless drawn by the Father**” (John 6:44). “*But the Father does not intend to draw us apart from means. Instead, he has preordained his Word and sacraments as the regular means and instruments for drawing people to himself. God wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. It is not the will of the Father or the Son that some not hear the proclamation of the Word or have contempt for it, nor should they expect to be drawn by the Father apart from Word or sacrament. According to his normal arrangement, the Father draws people by the power of His Holy Spirit through the hearing of his holy, divine Word, as with a net, through which the elect are snatched out of the jaws of the devil.*” (FC SD XI:76)

It has been said, “You can’t catch any fish, if you don’t throw out the net.” God has made us fishers of men. In order to catch people, we need to throw out the net of the gospel message. The Holy Spirit works through that proclamation of the gospel to create faith in the heart. God’s family grows when faith is created. Our Kingdom Workers Volunteers are coming to help us fish, to cast out the net. God’s purpose in having us do this is that those who are chosen, the elect, might come to faith and be saved. When Christian parents bring their little children to baptism the Holy Spirit works through the visible gospel proclaimed in that sacrament (sins are washed away) to create faith and give the gifts of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. Baptism is “**the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.**” (Titus 3:5) Jesus says we are “**born again**” when the Holy Spirit works through this spiritual washing (John 3:5-7). God

is making us his children, part of his family, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. As Members of the Family We Have the Privilege of Coming to Our Father in Prayer.

As members of the family we enjoy great blessings. One of those blessings is prayer. Paul wrote, 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.”** (v. 15) “Abba” is the Hebrew word for Father. We can pray to God as our Father just as Jesus did. Jesus taught us to address God as “**Our Father**” in the prayer he taught his disciples to pray (Mt. 6:9). Luther tells us the significance of this in his explanation in the Small Catechism: “*With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.*” Yes, we can be bold because we are no longer slaves who fear God’s punishment. Our sins have been atoned for by Jesus. He has endured the punishment for those sins as our Substitute. Through faith in Jesus worked by the Spirit we have become children who have forgiveness from a loving Father. Jesus wants us to remember the relationship we have with God by faith, so that we feel free to pray to our heavenly Father as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father. God will always do the loving thing the best thing for his children. Jesus said, “**Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to you children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!**” (Mt. 7:9-11) “**In him and through faith in Him we may approach God our Father with freedom and confidence.** (Ephesians 3:12)

And when we pray to our Father he will answer us. He will always give us what we want or need or something better. He answers in a way that is best for us now and for eternity. Sometimes his answer is “No” because sometimes we ask for things that are not according to his will. God know what’s best for us. He even said “No” to Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane because He knew what was best for us. Jesus had to drink the cup of suffering in order to save us. “**God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...**” (John 3:16) That Son “**did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for the world.**” (Mt. 20:28) If God “**did not spare his one and only Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things.**” (Romans 8:32) Because God gave us his one and only Son, we can be confident that he will hear and answer our prayers with the same love.

Are you making use of this blessing in your life?

3. As Children of God We Are Heirs with Christ.

But being part of the family doesn’t just mean blessing for this life. As true children of God, we are heirs, co-heirs with Christ. Paul wrote, “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.**”

Jesus told his followers that if they followed him they would have to carry a cross. Like their brother, Jesus, true children of God’s family share in his suffering for the gospel. When we speak God’s no to the world the reproach that Jesus endured will fall on us. No abortion except when the mother’s life is in jeopardy. No same-sex marriage! No practicing fellowship with others who are not united in the faith with us. Carrying this cross is not easy.

But the glory that we will share with Christ some day in heaven is incomparable to the suffering we endured while here on earth as members of God’s family. Paul wrote, “**I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.**” (Romans 8:18) What is it that we are heirs of with Christ? All the blessings that God the Father accords to his Son are also ours. Everything the risen, triumphant, ascended Christ has received from his Father belongs also to us. We children of God through faith in Jesus will receive honor with Christ and we will be put in an important position with Christ. We will participate in Christ’s rule. Paul doesn’t try to describe this glory further both because there are no words or experiences that could adequately describe the glory we will share with Christ, and because we can’t know or fully comprehend it fully. But we know it will be great and we eagerly anticipate and expect it because God is our loving and faithful God and Father. At best, we can only describe this glory in a negative way from experience. “**There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**” (Rev. 21:4) But even thinking about our future glory in this way creates in us a joy and excitement that leads us to pray, “**Come, Lord Jesus!**” (Rev. 22:21)

It’s always sad to say “Goodbye.” to the family. Ang, Jeff and kids went back to California. Tessa and Travis to Seattle, Kate and Joel to Nevada, Carrie, Jon and the kids to Minnesota Jared and his new bride, Kimberly to Sacramento, Jesse to Milwaukee and Justin to Minnesota. But it’s a great joy knowing that they’re all a part of God’s family doing the Lord’s work where he had led them to go. What a joy to know that someday we’ll all have the same address! Heaven. To the Triune God be all the glory for that. For we are children of God through the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.