

Adoption

Romans 8:12-17

Discipleship Essentials - Part Two: Understanding the Message of Christ

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Sunday, April 22, 2007

Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

Before I seek to bring the word of God to you in sermon, I have a few pastoral remarks for you. First of all, I bring you greetings from Louie and Coke Evans. Louie Evans was the senior pastor of this congregation in the 70's and 80's. My wife and I had a chance to visit with Louie and Coke in Fresno, California this past week and he's been struggling with his health, but appreciates all of the prayers you have offered on his behalf. Secondly, this week you'll receive a letter from me about the state of this church's stewardship and budget. Please prayerfully consider what I say and think of what God may be calling you to do in response to the financial need of our church. Third is that we, weekly, have an opportunity in the bulletin to see questions that relate to the sermon; the questions have been written by Eunice McGarrahan, our pastor. She writes questions that bring us into a conversation around the sermon topic in order to engage us in discipleship community. I encourage you to take time to look at these questions and to discuss them with friends and family. Fourth, we recognize that this has been a week where many people have walked—and continue to walk—in deep waters. The massacre at Virginia Tech has impacted all of our lives. And we, rightly so, in the sense that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, are called to share the sufferings of Jesus—who would not walk away from people in pain like that, but would engage them. And so we pray today. And we offer thoughts regarding the Word of God on the topic of adoption that might help us to engage some of the pain that we see in our country emanating from Virginia Tech. Let us pray together. Father in Heaven, speak to us, even now, through your son Jesus. May the word that is spoken through Christ be empowered by your Spirit that is shared between you and the Son. And may that be our Spirit: the Spirit that embraces us and adopts us into your household as sons and daughters. We pray this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Amen. If you are baptized and you follow Jesus Christ by intent in your life, you have received and embraced the love of God the Father. You are walking along with the Son and you are a son and daughter with Jesus; and you are doing so with a heavy call from the Spirit of God to be a part of the family of God. This week we have seen the sense of family spread through people who have common pain. Suddenly the family of Virginia Tech becomes a family gathered around grief and a determination to work through that grief together. The families of university students, faculty, and administrations around the United States, have become family in a way that is unique—because they identify with the pain and the loss of these very, very beloved students and faculty at Virginia Tech. A shared tragedy...a shared grief... a shared response from the nation...of those who have common investments, has made them to be a family. The family of God is like that. We have a common life that is in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul describes that life as being a life that shares both in the sufferings of Jesus and in the glory of Jesus. When we are family, we share in the pain as well as the gain. We are a part of a new family. God is our father—and some would address God as both the Father and Mother—the new parent that helps us to live. Jesus is the son, our brother. And the Spirit, the relationship between the Father and the Son of love, is shared with us so that we enter into that relationship of love between the Father and the Son. We have a new DNA. We have been touched by extreme gene therapy in the power of the Spirit. We are no longer bound by our families of origin, we are now in a family of eternity. The Church, as metaphor, is “family” in the New Testament; which means that we are not primarily today formed by this building. We are not primarily formed today by this event of worship. We are not primarily formed today because we are connected by membership. We are not formed today because of our common commitment to a pastor. We are formed today because we are grouped around Jesus, in the love of God. It is an organic reality that leads to an organizational reality. It is intimacy that has a practice in institution. It is about our family relationships. It is about the fact that we have been adopted into the family of God. In the past several years I have been one who has benefited from being embraced by Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ, from Korea. They have treated me as a brother. They have welcomed me. They have taken some of the teaching I have given, and have taken the book that I have written, and translated it into the Korean language. When I go to Korea, they embrace me as a brother in Christ. I have great sympathy for what the Korean people are going through this week and in the near future regarding the pain that has come out of the last week. If we have a brother or sister in Christ that is in pain because of their cultural background or their family of origin, then we as Christians, as brother and sisters, enter into their pain and understand it. However, we are called in Jesus Christ not to hold on to some of those patterns of our families of origin that were built in flesh and blood. You've heard families say to their children “You owe me. I am your flesh and blood.” It is not an appeal to the Spirit, it is an appeal to the family ties because of their common genetic connection. In fact, what Paul would argue here is that the only debt we owe to families that raise us is a debt of love—to love those as parents, and as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Spirit in the family of God frees us to be fully loving to our earthly families, but not bound by their restrictions or by their patterns of life. You've often heard it said that blood runs thicker than water. Recently we've heard that it might not be true in bioengineering in terms of its definition; and it's definitely not true in terms of baptism water because the Spirit runs thicker than blood. We are primarily children of God, not children of our families of origin. We are tied together by the blood of Jesus and the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and the power that ties us together as family in the kingdom of heaven. We are called then to let go of our earthly parenting and our earthly boundaries of family. We are called to be adopted into the family of our Heavenly Father. We allow our Heavenly Father then to complete us in maturity and in unfinished business; to heal us in our wounds and in our damaged lives and hearts. We are in debt to the Spirit and not to flesh and blood. The Spirit that emanates from the Father and the Son is the Spirit that has embraced us to be part of the family. We owe the Father and the Son a debt of love, and that debt of love is owed to our families of origin who have raised us to be who we are today. But we are not limited by those blood ties. The Spirit makes us children of God. All who are led by the Spirit, Paul says, are children of God. The Spirit bares witness to our spirit that we are children of God. The world is groaning in anticipation for the revealing of the children of God and what the children of God will do to make this a new heaven and new Earth. In baptism, as we have practiced it today, it is the moment where the parents are saying, “We are moving our children from our household and our blood family ties to be in the household of God and the ties of the Spirit.” That is what baptism does. It says that our children no longer belong to us; they belong to God. We are caretakers and trustees of their welfare and their nurture. The church is the family of God that joins the families in raising them, but these children belong to God. My parents, when I was about three years old, in a church that did not believe in infant baptism still brought me up to the front to be dedicated. Their act of dedication was: this child that has been born to us no longer belongs to us;

this child belongs to God. And they dedicated me to God's service as Hannah did with Samuel in the Old Testament. We must come to grips with the movement of our family and homes of origin to becoming full members of the family of God. This past week I was with a university in Northern California. I was there while the Virginia Tech tragedy was happening; the darkness and the grief on campus was felt viscerally. In the midst of that, in a chapel, one of the young men stood up and said "I am so thankful that I am no longer bound by my father who did not introduce me to God and who did not raise me to love God, but in fact, abused me and abandoned me. And I'm here today to say "I am a part of the family of God. I am God's son." That act of statement was an act of freedom in terms of embracing other people and their pain; because now I embrace them the way that Jesus would. In fact, the Spirit of Jesus is something that we can experience ourselves, in baptism. That moment that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the Father spoke from heaven and said, "You are my Son; you are beloved by me and with you I am well pleased." That is the voice that each of us can hear today—it is the gift of the new family. Adoption says that we are the family of God; that we are part of an extended family that goes worldwide; that we can have a new name; that we can bring pleasure to people who have needs around the world; that we can practice the disciplines and receive the boundaries of Jesus Christ; and that we move from the household of our origin into the household of God. And so today, it is important to realize that we are the benefactors of all of those who bring their gifts into this family. We share their wealth. When the disciples wondered with Jesus about whether they would have anything left because they had given up all wealth to follow Jesus, he said, "You will have one-hundredfold of houses and lands and families because you inherit everything and everyone who embraces me." This past week it became evident to me, as I was traveling up through Northern California, of some of that wealth from this family that can even impact me in Northern California. As I was listening to the Sacramento, California State University music station, they brought on a piece by Jeremiah Clark called the Suite for Trumpet and Organ and announced that it would be played with the trumpeter by William Neil—our organist. And I thought: isn't it wonderful how the family of God, in the sharing of gifts, can speak all the way from Washington D.C. via radio and CD. We share each other's wealth and presence. There is another aspect of this family movement that is important to the apostle Paul; and that is, that we not be bound by the fears and patterns of restraint that come out of our families and cultures of origin. Paul says we are no longer slaves, in fear, to who we've been in our past. We have a Spirit of belonging and adoption connected to God, that relieves us from falling back into patterns of fear. We are formed by love and not deformed by fear—because mature love casts out all fear. We learn to be loved by the Father and this releases us from being bound by some of the darkness and fear of our past. I once knew a young Jewish woman who had decided that she, in her Jewish understanding of life, would follow Jesus as her elder brother in the family of God. She told this to her dad, and her dad said, "Please reconsider that because I will not allow you to inherit anything in my house if you go to the household of Jesus." She said "I must follow Jesus;" and her father disinherited her. He tried to coerce and threaten her to stay with him, according to his culture and family of origin; and she decided to move on to the family of God through Christ. American family values sometimes tie us into our blood ties and don't focus enough on our Spirit ties. It is good that we are raised in families that love God. But as good as they are and as hopeful as they are in committing themselves to raise children, they are never going to replace the love of God, the Father. And so today, as parents and grandparents, with this baptism you commit yourself to move your child from being bound by your family of origin ties, to being bound by the freedom of Christ and his family. We have seen what happens to people who treat others as family this past week. The professor, who stood at the door while the gunman was coming and would not let the gunman in the door while the students were going out the window, was killed as a sacrifice for being in the way. That professor, having gone through the Holocaust, and experiencing this day of holocaust, understood what it meant to be as one who loved brothers and sisters and took care of his family in his classroom. That is a signal to us that there is a greater family responsibility. Jesus calls us even to lay down our lives for our friends and our family, and even our enemies. Paul goes on to say that, in the midst of the pain that we can experience and the tragedy, we can have an authority we can cry out to. It isn't just to call mom and dad on the phone, it is to cry out "Abba! Daddy! Father in Heaven! I am in trouble, we are in trouble. Please hear our prayer." It is a fact that we see in Jesus' life when he is in pain in garden of Gethsemane, at the end of his time of suffering that he says, "My Father, (my Abba, Daddy) if it is possible, let this cup of suffering pass from me. Yet, not what I want, but what you want." God wants to be with us as parent in the midst of our pain. We have an Abba to go through in adversity. It doesn't end with that, because if we share in Christ's suffering and we show that we are children of God, we will also share in Christ's glory and show that we are children of God. In fact, as Paul said in another place, we not only share in Christ's sufferings but we also share in the glory and the future of who Jesus Christ is—risen from the dead, and reigning forever. We are heirs of God. We inherit all of God's wealth. We inherit everything that Jesus inherits. We are coheirs; we are not secondary heirs, or slave heirs, or minor heirs. We are full heirs. We share everything with Jesus. And we are royalty: princes and princesses; kings and queens. And that is the reward to those who suffer with Christ—they begin to be called to reign with Christ forever. This is somewhat best illustrated by that little book by C.S. Lewis, in the Narnia series, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* where, at the end, the children are given kingdoms and queendoms so they can rule with Aslan forever. We share everything in Christ—the suffering as well as the glory; the pain and the gain; the good and the bad. We share it today and we share it forever. Today, as we think about Virginia Tech and other places of pain around the world, because of Christ we are called to enter into, as family members, the pain of others. We share that pain and struggle with that pain together, as the family of God. And so we pray for those that are in pain today—we don't abandoned them. We engage in their trauma; their pain; their loss; their sorrow; and their grief. We pray for the Virginia Tech family; for the Cho family; for all university students and families; and for all Korean families who share in that trauma—because we are children of God and we will not leave those who are struggling in their sorrow and pain. It's a wonderful revelation that is going to take place in the future, according to Paul, when we, as children of God, are totally revealed in how we walk with Jesus and what Jesus will do with us. The entire creation will be transformed; everything will be made new; because, as Paul says, we are now going to rule with Christ forever. Where there is pain, there is also glory. All creation waits; the whole world waits; the whole earth waits to see what will happen when God's children take full responsibility and start fully doing the work of Jesus and the family in the world. C.S. Lewis said that "the Son of God became a man, so that all men might become children of God." My adjustment today for all of us is that: the Son of God became a child, so that all people might become children of God. Let us live into our baptism call today with these children and these families, and be the family of God in Jesus Christ. Let us pray. God, our Father, make us your family. Help us to walk with Jesus as our brother, by the power of your Spirit, through all of the pain that you call us to engage, and into the glory of your everlasting presence. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.