

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13
Church: The Family of God
Sunday July 12th, 2015

I want to start today with a bold statement. **You were made or created by God to be a part of God's family.** You were brought into this world with part of your express purpose in life to belong to God's family. This is something God planned for you before you were born. It is part of God's plan for every human being, but some find and pursue their purpose and others reject it.

Rev. Rick Warren in his book "What on Earth Am I Here For?" states, "The entire Bible is the story of God building a family who will love him, honor him, and reign with him forever." p. 119 The Bible says, **"His (God's) unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure."** Eph. 1:5 NLT

Because God's inward nature, the core of God's being is love, God values relationships above almost anything else. At God's core God is relational and defines "himself in family terms: Father, Son, and Spirit."

The Holy Trinity is a reminder that at the core of God's being there is relationship. God did not need to create human beings in order to have relationships. God has never been alone or lonely. God didn't need a family—he desired one, so he devised a plan to create us, bring us into his family, and share with us all he has.

In our John passage this is evident when Jesus says, **"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"**

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." John 14:2-3

God wants us as part of his family to share in the inheritance of Jesus Christ. God wants to give us heaven. And in this it gives God

great pleasure. “It was a happy day for (God) when he gave us our new lives, through the truth of his Word, and we became, as it were, the first children in his new family.” James 1:8 LB

Now in this world, while in the flesh, all of us feel some separation, some isolation, some loneliness for each of us is a separate human being and we must reach across time and space with imperfect words and touch to connect to others. Some, though, are truly lonely and are separated from others.

Their family is either separated from them by space, or broken relationship, or even death. They are alone and lonely in this world and thus are acutely aware of their separation from others and from God. They desire a “family” with every bit of their being.

Most in this church probably identify here. We are almost all from different areas of the country with children and grandchildren spread all over the United States.

Some though are immersed in an extended family with generations coming together regularly for food, fun, fellowship and faith. They have no sense of separation from family. For them it is easy to think of belonging to the family of God in a very positive way, and internally they have no push like the lonely to find or create family for they have all they want. They belong.

Both the lonely and the connected, though, need the family of God. They need the family of God for **the relationships of the family of God are eternal**. “Our earthly families though wonderful gifts from God are temporary and fragile, often broken by divorce, distance, growing old, and inevitably death.” p. 120

I often use John 14 in my memorial sermons to lift up the message that the only things that go with us from this life to the next are our relationships of love. It is from God, who is love, we come, and it is to

God, who is love, we go. In the meantime we experience God and witness the inner character of God through our relationships of love. It is these relationships that last forever, and bring us from this world to the next, through our faith in Jesus Christ.

We, in fact, become part of the family of God through faith. We become children of God in the New Testament sense through faith. Romans 8:15-17 reads, **“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.**

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.”

It is through faith in Jesus Christ that we are adopted into the family of God. As Galatians 3:26 says, **“for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”**

In that all human beings are loved by God, then in a generic sense all are children of God. But when the New Testament speaks of a “child of God” it is a person who has become a part of the Family of God through faith. Many can see the danger in this type of teaching.

It is dangerous if we think being a child of God is only a place of privilege. That once we have believed and been born again/adopted into the family of God we are among the saved and the rest of the world isn't. That type of thinking is dangerous and people who believe like that and live that out inflict all sorts of terror in this world.

Being a child of God is not a place of privilege but of responsibility for when we are adopted into the family of God through faith we take on the family name and the responsibility of being an ambassador of our Father God and brother Christ in all we say and do. We represent the family!

Through faith we are born again/adopted into the family of God and receive a tremendous inheritance, which I will get to, but we also take on a greater responsibility to lead lives of love in this world.

Our adoption papers into the family of God are our baptismal certificates. Here is my Grandmother's on my Dad's side:



1881

Your baptismal certificate and those of your family members are sacred documents to be treasured and preserved. They are symbols of us and our parents accepting God's gift of forgiveness and faith. They are symbols of us wanting to be a part of the family of God and accepting that gift, reaching out and grasping that gift.

Romans 8:17 refers to us being heirs of God and heirs of Christ, **"we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."**

What then is the family inheritance? The Bible says, **"God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay."**

Again Rick Warren reminds us according to the Bible we have five parts to this inheritance:

First, we will be with God forever.

Second, we will be completely changed to be like Jesus.

Third, we will be free from all pain, death, and suffering.

Fourth, we will be rewarded and reassigned positions of service.

Fifth, we will share in Christ's glory.

We have a rich inheritance in Christ Jesus that we will all inherit one day if we are ready to grasp it and sacrifice for it here on earth and even at times suffer for it. With great privilege comes great responsibility.

So we know that a great inheritance is coming in, “The sweet by and by!” But what do we do in the meantime? How are we to live our lives in the responsibility of a child of God?

One sentence out of our 1 Thessalonians passage speaks to this, verses 11 and 12, “**As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”**

I started this message reminding you of two groups of people, those who feel alienated and like they don't belong to a family, and those who do. This message is a message of hope for those who feel alone and lonely and work orders for those who know they belong.

To those who feel alone and lonely, you can see now how by faith you can be a part of the oldest, largest family here on earth. For those who feel they belong, the message is to imitate Paul who of course imitated Jesus Christ who is the perfect image of God the Father.

We are to be mothers and fathers to those around us in the church. We need to go beyond being friendly to being deeply hospitable. We need to lead lives that others would want. Reaching out in a true family-like manner, not just friendliness so that we can become a fellowship, a family of God, where we see each other as brothers and sisters; mothers and fathers; aunts and uncles.

Paul, in writing as he did, was asking the Thessalonians to imitate him and his lifestyle and to truly love each other as he loved them,

“urging and encouraging and pleading with one another that you lead lives worthy of God.”

In the January 6th Upper Room devotional it quoted Ephesians 5:1-2, **“Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”**

The story was about a man and his two-year old son, Caleb, who loves to imitate him and his mom. This two-year old liked to try on shoes and slippers. He would vacuum and shovel snow just like his parents. He even would mimic their sentences and words down to the intonation.

He went on to say, “Because God is our heavenly Father; it is natural and right to imitate him. Through such imitation we learn how to live most fully.”

The writer goes on to say, “We learn how to love others by trying to love them as God does.” And how does God love? Like Jesus, for remember Jesus said, **“If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” John 14:7**

Now there are many ways to love like Jesus loved, to love like God loves, but here is one suggestion. Live a life others would want. Go the extra step of inviting people into your life like Paul did. Be like a joyful father or mother welcoming a son or daughter home. Welcome the stranger as if they were your son or daughter. Don’t wait for an invitation to come to you but make it to another.



Invite someone new to lunch after church or to a Bible Study, the UMM or UMW or to serve alongside you in a mission like the Agua Prieta ministry. Invite someone to your home and feed them. You are

so good at that. Vista is known for its friendliness. Deede and I will be breaking bread with members of Vista for the next 7 or 8 months.

As I spoke with Jan Hopke-Almer this week I realized you have been inviting children into the family of God in the most extraordinary way through your work in Agua Prieta. Children who have grown up in utter poverty have received your grace, a grace they did nothing to earn, a grace that comes from God through you. They have received the gift of an education through the school supplies you provide.

You through your extraordinary hospitality, you have invited them in! You have invited them to be a part of your family, the Family of God.

You live as your sign says:



What has God said? What will you do?

In Jesus Name amen!