

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Lord:

This sermon may have been better if it had been preached last week. After all, last Sunday was Father’s Day. For many that meant doing something special for dad. For many others, it was a time of looking back, thinking of a father who had passed away. Some people, in remembering, will think back to some of the things they remember their fathers telling them. There must have been those people who remembered words of advice such as, “Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” Others remembered either cute sayings or those stock phrases I think most of us have heard: “This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you”. “You’ll thank me for this some day”. “Stop crying, or I’ll give you something to cry about”. A radio announcer quoted his father and the warning he used to give when they were misbehaving: “Your butt is grass and I’m the lawn mower.”

Most of us can probably recall some of those things which our fathers told us, although there are also those things that we desperately try to forget over the years. Some of those things our fathers told us we will remember with fondness in years to come. Others may have been guiding principles for our lives. Still others will make us think of our father when ever we hear them.

In our text today Paul speaks of us as sons of God; sons and daughters of the King of King and Lord of Lord. As majestic as our Father is, we have the privilege and joy of knowing Him as *Abba*. In the Bible, the name ‘Abba’ does not refer to a Swedish pop group; rather, the word is the common Aramaic word for Dad or daddy. The name suggests an intimacy, a closeness, a special bond between father and child. Knowing this wonderful relationship with our God, we want to think of some of the things our heavenly Father tells us, for the things our Father tells us are wonderful things. He tells us things that bring us comfort and hope. His words to us are words of promise and blessing. They are words of love and joy. They are the words spoken to us by the most loving of fathers, who loves us, His children, with an everlasting love.

The first thing our Father tells us in our text today is that He is indeed our Father. St. Paul tells us in our text: *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. This may sound like stating the obvious, but we always need to remember that it is only by God’s grace that we can enjoy life as His children. Our sin separates us from God. Jesus tells the Pharisees: *“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.”* (John 8:44, ESV) That judgement applies to everyone who lives apart from faith and the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. All too often, even in the life of a believer, God has every reason to disown us because of the things we choose to do against His will day after day. We are not talking about the fact that we fail to clean our room, or maybe miss a curfew. Our sins involve things like taking His name in vain, or mistreating those around us, or lying. We abuse His gift of sex; we misuse the resources and gifts He entrusts to us. Sin clings to us all. It brings forth death. If we are honest with ourselves we will all say with St. Paul: *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Romans 7:24, ESV)

It is that very reality of our sin and the death we deserve that makes the things our Father tells us so wonderful. Yes, we were in slavery to sin. Yes, we were dying, and doomed to an eternity of punishment and torment. Yet, throughout this text, there is a promise of freedom and release. There is the promise of adoption into a new family and a better life. In these words, Paul assures us of God’s love when he writes: *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman,*

born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. God tells us we are His children. Even though we have wandered away from Him; even though we have lived as if we are our own god, still He reaches out to us in love, to save us from sin and death. He redeems us—He buys us back from our slavery to the devil—and brings us into His family and gives us all the right and privileges of sons. Our Father tells us: “I forgive you. I know your weakness and your imperfect ways I know you fail to keep my rules, but I still love you. I want you as My child”. That is why God sent His Son.

In a cemetery in a small town in Iowa, a grave from the Civil War has the name, date and rank of a soldier. But underneath this it says: “He died serving in the place of—and it lists another name. During the draft in the Civil War, it was permissible for one man to volunteer to serve in the place of another one who was drafted. It was often done for money, especially by single, unattached men who sought the adventure of war, or by a friend who didn’t want to see a man leave his family. On the cross, we see that same message. God the Son, Jesus Christ died serving in the place of all people. The Everlasting Son of the Father comes to us, lives among us, becomes obedient to the law for us, and dies to set us free. He sacrifices His life for the children God will bring into His family through Baptism.

Our Father tells us even more. He says that we are ***heirs according to promise***. One of the sad realities for many families comes when the parent’s wills are probated. Brothers and sisters, not to mention other relatives, can all become bitter and angry over the division of an estate. It is so much harder if things are not clearly spelled out in a will. (As a side note, if you don’t have a will, we encourage you to get it done, even if you think you are young and don’t need it yet. It is the best protection you can give against these problems. It is also one way for you to give gifts to the church and to other special areas, while still providing the maximum benefit to your descendants). We don’t have to worry about that as the children of God. God spells things out for us. He talks about our rights as His children. He tells us what He has prepared for us. Again, it is Paul who reminds us: ***“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”*** (2 Timothy 4:8, ESV) We look forward in joy to an inheritance greater than anything this world can imagine! It is, first and foremost, the inheritance of life through the living Lord Jesus, because the Jesus who died for us rose from the dead that Easter day so many years ago. He promises us: ***“Because I live, you also will live.”*** (John 14:19, ESV) That living Lord, who ascended back to His throne also promises to come and take us to be with Him in His heavenly kingdom. Every mention of heaven in Scripture is something wonderful and glorious. In the book of Revelation we are told: ***“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*** (Revelation 21:3–4, ESV)

How blessed we are to be so loved by such a gracious father. In our Old Testament lesson today, God says to Isaiah: ***“I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by my name.”*** (Isaiah 65:1, ESV) While God also reminded Isaiah that sinful people have no right to approach Him, we are blessed to have a Father who is approachable. He tells us: ***“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”*** (Psalm 50:15, ESV) We come to God in prayer, confident that He will hear and do what is best, in accordance with His wise, all-perfect ways. He will not always give us what we want, just as any loving parent knows that saying ‘no’ to their children is a good thing to do much of the time. But He will help. He will deliver. He will rescue. And He will give us His Spirit to keep us in faith and hope, no matter what the devil, this world and our own sinfulness may bring upon us.

This same loving Father tells us He is concerned about our day to day needs. In the explanation of the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed, Luther writes: *I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.* (SC, 1st Article)

How blessed we are that God says to us: “I am your God, your Father. In the waters of Holy Baptism, I have made you My child. I am with you to bless you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. I give you My law to guard you and to guide you. Listen to Me. Learn from Me. Walk in the path I set before you, for I have your best interest at heart. And I will give you life with Me forever in glory.” What glorious things our Father says to us! What a joy it is to hold His Word and promise in our

hearts through all our days! Amen.