

Sermon for June 19, 2016 – 5th Sunday after Pentecost/Father's Day

Galatians 3:26-29 (NIV84)

Theme: Celebrate your Heavenly Father's Love

- 1) Through faith in Christ, you are His Son.
- 2) Through faith in Christ, you are united with His other children
- 3) Through faith in Christ, you are His heir.

²⁶ You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Chuckⁱ was a troubled teen who grew up on the streets of Milwaukee. His father abandoned him when he was young and his mother was too high on drugs to care. Social services placed him in foster homes, but he hated them and ran away whenever he could. He learned to live on the streets – doing what he felt he needed to do in order to survive. The only love and support he found was from a local gang.

After getting arrested for a misdemeanor and ending up in juvie, he was placed with a pastor. The pastor was patient with Chuck – even though he ran away a few times and the cops had to bring him back. The pastor slowly built a relationship with him – treating Chuck as his own son by showing him undeserved respect, love and dignity. Chuck calmed down after some time. He grew to respect and love the pastor. He quit the gang and, after a while, became the pastor's actual son through adoption.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, on a spiritual level our lives are similar to Chuck's. No matter how religious and church going our parents were, we were all born into this world spiritually sinful, troubled and broken. Abused by the devil, world and our sinful natures we were harassed and lost. But then it happened. For some of us it happened very early in life and for others it was later. God took us into his care and adopted us as his dearly loved sons through faith in Christ. Why? Simply because He chose to!

Let's consider how God's underserved love has changed us, under the theme: **Celebrate your Heavenly Father's Love.** 1) Through faith in Christ, you are His Son. 2) Through faith in Christ, you are united with His other children 3) Through faith in Christ, you are His heir.

Part One: Through faith in Christ you are His Son.

Did you ever hear the story about the baby God found? It goes like this: One day God was looking over his creation and he heard the sound of a baby crying. When God looked at the baby, he saw that it was an abandoned newborn and that it was also in great danger. The devil was prowling

around near the child. He too heard its cries and was about to kill it. God couldn't let that happen, so do you know what he did? He snatched the child away from the devil.

God carried the dirty, crying baby home in his arms. While giving it a bath, he said: "Hush my child, don't cry. You are safe. I have washed away all the filth you were born with. I am clothing you with the righteousness my Son Jesus won through his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection. You belong to me." And then he turned to the angels of heaven and said: "Do you see this baby? I adopt this child as my own. Watch over him. Keep him safe from the devil. If he wanders into danger, warn him. Direct him to my Word that He might always know my love and not run away."

Do you want to know which saint the baby in this story grew up to be? It's you. That's right: you are the baby God adopted in this story. Everything I described happened to you at your Baptism. While your pastor held you in his arms, poured water over you and said: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" - God the Father held your soul in his arms and washed you clean from all sin. He clothed you with Christ's righteousness and declared to all the saints and angels of heaven: "Listen everyone to what I have done: I have sent my Spirit to create faith in this child's heart to receive the forgiveness my Son has won for it. From now on whenever I look at this child I will see my Son and love him as such."

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!ⁱⁱ How can we know that this is true? Because the Bible says: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

Think about what this means: you don't have to go through life trying to earn God's favor. You already have it through faith. And notice that God doesn't just call you his child. He calls you his Son. Why? Because whenever He sees you He sees Jesus – His one and only Son. He sees Jesus' record of keeping the law perfectly for you. He sees Jesus' sacrifice for your forgiveness. You are a Christian. You bear the name of Christ. You are God's Son.

OK, now that we have established the wonderful relationship we have with God through faith in Christ Jesus, the next question we should ask is what does being God's son mean for our lives? Does it mean that we can live however we want and expect God to bless us? Does it mean that I can pursue whatever sin I want – knowing that God will love and forgive me in the end? Absolutely not! God did not save us from the consequences of our sins so that we could willingly go back to pursuing them.

Remember the story I told you about Chuck? The pastor did not take him into his house so that he could continue being a gangbanger and break the law. No, he took Chuck in so that He could offer him a new life – one with purpose and meaning. I also mentioned that the pastor was patient with Chuck. Don't interpret that to mean that the pastor let him do whatever he wanted to do. No, there were rules and if the rules were broken, there would be consequences. The key, however, is that, even when it came to discipline, the pastor made it obvious that everything he did was done out of love.

The same is true in our relationship with God. Being his Son through faith does not mean we can do whatever we want. Rather, as God's children, we want to obey and please him. And just as any good parent sets rules and enforces them to benefit their children and help them grow, so also the LORD uses his Law to protect and benefit us. He may discipline us when we sin, but we need to understand that this discipline is for our good. It teaches us to avoid sin. God's discipline is meant to keep us from great harm. And what is that harm? Running away from him and into the devil's trap. You see – he is still out there, prowling around like a lion, looking for someone to devour.ⁱⁱⁱ

Part Two: Through faith in Christ, you are united with His other children

That's why, when God made us His sons, he also did something else: he united us with other people from all over the globe into one family in order that we might help and encourage one another. St. Paul writes: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Now please understand these words correctly: the apostle Paul is not abolishing the various roles, vocations and stations God has established on this earth. God has given humanity a wonderful diversity. We are not all the same – nor would it be beneficial if we were. When it comes to our faith, however, Christians are united. We don't look at each other as different or not belonging due to our race, age, gender or station. We are one in Christ – forming one body.

And it's important that we see each other this way. Why? Because this is how God sees us. And if God sees Jesus in each and every one of us, shouldn't we see Jesus in each other? Think of the effect this will have! If we see Jesus in each other, we will be less quick to judge and more willing to forgive. If we see Jesus in each other, we will be more likely to bear patiently with each other's annoying opinions, habits and sins – remembering how Jesus bore with ours. If we see Jesus in each other, we will learn to value each other – always ready to defend, help and love one another as the brothers and sisters in God's family that he declared us to be.

Through faith in Christ, God has united us together as a band of brothers. Do any of you remember the miniseries by that name: "Band of Brothers"? It was a dramatized retelling of the history of "Easy" Company (a group of American paratroopers during World War II). Why do I mention it now? Because that mini-series showed how very different men grew together as a Band of Brothers – caring for each other as they worked together to survive and accomplish their mission.

We too are at war. We too are very different and unique from each other, and yet, in Christ, the LORD has made us a band of brothers. Each one of us is important to one another. Together we march into the fray. Together we fight. Together we storm the devil's stronghold with the Gospel – confident of the victory we have in Christ.

Part Three: Through faith in Christ, you are His heir.

St. Paul says: *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the*

promise.

God's love in adopting us as his sons in baptism and uniting us together in faith was all for a purpose: that we might share in the inheritance he promised Abraham. And what is that inheritance? It is God himself – all that He is and has - for all eternity. Since God has covered us with Christ's righteousness through faith and declared us to be his sons, then it stands to reason that he will also give us the life and glory that He gave Jesus.

And the Bible also says as much. In another place, St Paul once wrote: *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 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. . . He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*^{iv}

Jesus himself said: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*^v

Brothers and sisters in Christ – as you remember your earthly fathers today; don't forget to celebrate your Heavenly Father's love for you. Through faith in Christ he has made you his son. Through faith in Christ he has united you to a family of believers that cares for you. Through faith in Christ, he has made you his heir. Let these truths guide you through out your life – motivating you to obey God's commands and live your life in hope. Amen.

ⁱ What follows is based on a true story. Names and events were change to keep anonymity.

ⁱⁱ 1 John 3:1 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Peter 5:8

^{iv} Romans 8:16-17, 32 NIV84

^v John 14:1-3 NIV84