

Getting the Relationship Straight

Romans 8:12-17

Do you know someone who's been adopted? Have you been adopted or are you perhaps an adoptive parent? Was your brother or sister adopted? Do you have a friend who was adopted or may has adopted children?

Paul told the young Christian church in Rome that they had been given a "Spirit of adoption as children of God." They could receive that Spirit or the other option was receiving a Spirit of slavery and fear. By adoption, Paul meant that they were really children of God emotionally and spiritually, not biologically – through shared relationship and not shared genes.

The Bible tells us that we are creations in God's image. In the second creation story found in Genesis, man was formed from the dust of the ground and filled with the breath of God. Woman was formed from the DNA of man, equal not subordinate, and filled with the same holy *pneuma, ruach*, breath of the Spirit.

We have been given a spirit of adoption, not a spirit of fear. The Roman Christians were a church not started by the Apostle Paul. Yet he was, in a sense, adopting them as his own before coming to be with them. As it turned out, Paul lived out the remainder of his life in their midst as he awaited trial before Caesar. And he died as part of their community.

Many of you know our daughter Lisa who is adopted. She was born in Bogotá, Colombia. You might even know some of her story. It's a really good story. I'd like to share a small part of that story you may not know. A few years after Lisa came to make her home with us, we had a guest speaker at our former church, where I served before coming to Kansas City. This guest speaker was Rabbi Dr. Edwin Friedman, author of such books as *Generation to Generation* and *Friedman's Fables*. He was known as the guru of family systems in church and synagogue.

That evening, Friedman gave a great, and very funny, tongue in cheek lecture on parenting called, "How to get your kid to drop out and save yourself \$100,000." He told parents the worst possible approaches to parenting with the humorous goal to save yourself all that college tuition. The trick was not to go too far by putting them into psycho therapy for years because that could be very expensive as well.

After the lecture, Friedman took questions including one asked by the mother of a young child adopted from Colombia. This question concerned the difference between being the mother of a child who is your biological child and one who is your adopted child. Friedman's response shocked all of us, and its truth remains with me today. The first part of his answer was not surprising. The most intense family relationship is that of mother and child, especially mother and daughter. But then he said that the mother-child relationship is even more intense between mother and adopted child. Far from being less intense, the adoptive relationship between parents and children is the most intense.

We are all adopted children of God. It is an intense relationship for us even when we try to downplay or ignore it. Paul was trying to communicate to those early Christians a truth we

should hear as well, that this relationship is also very intense for God. We are not stepchildren in the pejorative sense of that word, though many seem to seek out that status of not being highly valued and included by God. Paul was saying just the opposite. We are adopted, chosen, and intentionally children of God.

My experience with friends who were not so familiar with adoption, but who knew we were adoptive parents, is that they would ask us if we chose to adopt because we could not have children *of our own*. They did not even know how far off base they were! It is true we chose adoption because we were unable to have another biological child, but we definitely, through the process of adoption, have been blessed with a child *of our own* in every meaningful sense of that world.

The "learning" for me as an adoptive parent is how intense the relationship is between adoptive parents and children. The adoption agency told us to only adopt if you really want to be parents. Don't do it to save or rescue the child. No other reason, however altruistic, is enough to sustain the work, the commitment, and the relationship.

Now, I'd like to engage in some theological projection – yet isn't all our theology a form of projecting onto God our perspectives, wants, and needs? In our experience in relationship – especially parenting – it seems reasonable to engage in projection. We are here, created and adopted by God for the sole reason that God really wants to be in relationship with us -- to love us and to hope that we love God back.

Many children who are adopted are on a quest to find their birth parents. This is a heartfelt and intense search, something like Alex Haley's search for his roots. It is a quest for identity and that sometimes elusive fantasy about finding the people whose genetic roots will solve all problems. Clearly it won't for most people, but it is an important quest nonetheless and it will deepen and enrich their stories.

We are all God's children by adoption, chosen in love, and also children of God, born of the Spirit. This is a deep mystery. We share with Jesus a dual nature of spirit and flesh – human and divine. Ultimately, the quest to find our roots is a journey deep within ourselves: a journey of honesty, a journey of questioning, learning, grieving, and rejoicing. It is a solitary journey, yet one that is only taken as part of a community. The Apostle Paul was inviting a young Christian community in Rome to walk with him and be family together.

We are part of a community of faith at Crossroads Church. We are a family of children of God. And we are called and challenged to invest our gifts – time, talents, and treasures -- not in a spirit of fear, but in a spirit of faith. We are called and challenged to add our vision and efforts to the ministry of Crossroads Church so that this community will continue to grow as a community, continue to shine in this neighborhood and this city as a sign of hope, and to shine with a passion for peace and justice. Let us continue to stand as a welcoming sign, inviting each other and all we meet to the journey.

You and I are children of God, adopted and loved, embraced and empowered by the elemental power of the universe – God. We are called by the life of Jesus in whose words and example we

still today see the nature of God. You and I are children of God, born of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, and invited by the Spirit on a journey of self-discovery and personal calling – to find in our living an answer to the question, “how will I invest myself to change the world in Jesus’ name?”

This week is a microcosm of the challenge to live by faith at Crossroads. Today, all our different work groups are presenting their charters, their ministry proposals for the 2009-10 church year. These groups provide a great opportunity to commit our time and talents through the ministry of Crossroads Church. Then, next Sunday, we bring our financial pledges representing commitments that will keep our building open and keep this space open.

We live in challenging times. Our energies are being pulled in different directions and our lives disrupted by stress. This is certainly a time of financial stress and, in many cases, distress which means this is a great opportunity to step up. Financially, commit what you can, but please commit, and not in a spirit of fear, but in a spirit of faith.