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Daddy, Daddy!

Romans 8:12-17

This flu season is one of the worst in recent memory. As many of you know, Pastor Mark and I were both hit pretty badly with illness recently. I was out of commission for 11 days. Now, when I first started getting symptoms I went into the urgent care office immediately because it sure seemed like flu symptoms, and I wanted to know right away if that was the case. So I went into the office and requested a flu swab. Has anybody here had a flu swab? Do you know what they do? They take a swab, shove it up your nose, and poke your brain with it. It's rather unpleasant. Anyway, the flu swab came back negative! Good news right? So, the doc said it probably wasn't flu, you should be fine, just get some rest and you'll be all right. I wish. Four days later, I go to bed with a 102 degree fever and wake up feeling absolutely miserable. Full on vertigo episodes, muscle spasms, along with the fever and aching, coughing, blah blah. Turns out I hadn't been watching my fluids carefully and I was pretty dehydrated. So I go back into urgent care, just to make sure I'm all right, and I get my brain stabbed for flu again. Guess what? I had Influenza A. Basically swine flu. It turns out those flu swabs only work 60% of the time! So I thought the docs had given me good news: no flu! But turns out, they had bad news: influenza A.

Well this morning I want to do the opposite. I want to give you bad news first. I want to shake you up, make you think really hard about your spiritual life. Then I want to give you one of the most profound assurances the New Testament has to offer, something that could even change your life. It changed mine.

Well, without further ado, let's dive into the passage at hand. We're looking at a chapter in Romans I consider to be one of the mountain peaks of the New Testament. Ellis mentioned a couple of weeks ago that Romans 8 is one of his favorite chapters, and I have to agree. In fact, it is my favorite chapter in the Bible. And we're looking today at one of my favorite verses in my favorite chapter, in Romans 8:12-17.

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The first two verses of this passage really serve as a summary of the passages that Pastor Mark and Pastor Ellis have already preached on these last two weeks. After all Paul has said, he's summing up by telling us there's either a way to life, or a way to death. And the critical piece to the way to life is the Spirit.

Pastor Mark has mentioned this before, but I'll say it again: we don't say enough about the work of the Spirit. It's easy to read this passage and see "put to death the deeds of the flesh" while totally missing the how of that: by the Spirit. There is no finding life without the Spirit. But so often I'm afraid the mentality of so many Christians is a pull-myself-up-from-my-own-bootstraps mentality. We've gotten the "get-out-of-hell-free" card, but we're living in hell until we get to heaven, because we are all to ignorant, or resistant, of the work of the Spirit in our lives.

The devastation of WWII is incredible, and one of the greater impacts after the war was the incredible number of orphans who were left behind. There actually aren't great statistics on this, as far as I could tell, but these children numbered in the hundreds of thousands, 300,000 from Germany alone. In 1982, they began putting up posters in Germany that said, "Who am I?" "What is my name?" "Where did I come from?" On those posters were pictures of orphans with inscriptions that read like this one,

"She was found in a baby carriage on April 3 or 4, 1945, at 45 Spittalgasse, Pressburg. In the baby carriage were a damask blanket with embroidered monogram 'M.K.' and a baptism picture of pink silk with silver inscription."

Even in 1982, they were still trying to find out who these children, who were no longer children, belonged to.

But at the end of WWII, psychologists began to pay closer attention to the effect of deprivation on children and they found that orphans exhibited very common effects from the loss of their parents. Things like self-soothing. These children had to find ways to deal with the pain of loss, so repetitive and compulsive soothing behavior like playing with hair or rocking would be common. Orphans commonly self-parent, so psychologists have found it common to see these children in adopted homes, teaching their new parents how to put on makeup, or how to do laundry, because for so long they had to do that themselves. These orphans would find ways to manage their environment and care for themselves, even after they'd been adopted into homes. They'd hide food away, or they'd steal things that they thought they needed instead of simply asking for them.

Now I bring up the behaviors of orphans because I see these things in Christians. Many of us act like orphans, and I'm including myself here. We find ways to self-soothe. Sometimes they're innocuous, like binge-watching TV or binge-eating food. Sometimes they're more harmful, like sex or gossiping. And yes, I'm talking about Christians here. We self-parent, often telling God or each other what we think we know, without bothering to consult either. And boy do we try to control our environment. We do the right thing, say the right thing, so that we can get the right outcomes in life, and with God. We save our money, dress the right way, know the right people so that we look successful in life. And maybe we say a prayer every once in a while, but ultimately we believe, deep down, that it's all up to us to figure life out. We act like spiritual orphans. We act like the one Jesus called the Helper, the Holy Spirit, isn't part of our lives at all. But heed Jesus' words in John 14, this promise to us:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have someone who's made a home inside you. That's what Paul is banking on, that's what Scripture promises us. So let me ask you, when was the last time you sensed the work of the Spirit in you? When have you ever felt conviction, not guilt, but conviction that leads to life and peace? When have you felt that you were reminded of God's truth? When have you experienced learning something new and profound about Jesus that hit your soul? When have you

ever felt old desires replaced by new redeemed desires? When have you had the words you need to say just come to you? These are all part of the dynamic work of the Spirit at work within us. Don't squelch that work, don't resist it. Welcome it, listen for the person of the Holy Spirit to do that work of putting to death the flesh in you.

That's the bad news, that we all too often live like orphans. But here's the good news: you're not an orphan. You're a child of God.

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Notice the completeness of that statement. ALL who are led by the Spirit are children of God. They are synonymous. If you have the Spirit, you are a child of God. Paul connects the work of the Spirit with our place as children.

But in order to make that connection for you, I have to talk about not just the Holy Spirit, but also the Son and the Father, the three persons of the godhead that we call the Trinity. I want to tell you the story of the Trinity, a story you may never have heard told like this. I will do my best to tell this story as simply as I can, because it's a story filled with mystery and wonder. The beginning of the story is a community. Before there was time, before there was matter, there existed in holy, pure community the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father delights in the Son, and the Son in the Father, and the Holy Spirit is love that flows between the Father and the Son. All three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are all unique persons, but they are so perfectly united in will that they are one God. These three lived in perfect love, perfect community, eternal self-giving, like a trio of dancers in perfect sync. From the overflow of their love, the Godhead, three in one, decided to create. In Genesis it says they said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," but they knew that the overflow of their love, this act of creation, would come at terrible cost to them, because mankind would reject God, and God would pay the price to have mankind back. In the fullness of time, Philippians 2 tells us that the Son, the one whom the Father loves, did not grasp onto his equality with God but emptied himself and took onto himself the nature of a human being. God the Son became man. In the Son, God and man became joined together. The Son lived a perfect, obedient life and suffered and died on our behalf, as a man, but was then raised to life, and took his place back in the Godhead, equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But now, something was different. Now we, through the Son, because he took on the nature of a human being, could be united with him by the Spirit. And we can enjoy the same love the Father has for the Son. We became Sons and Daughters of God, brothers and sisters of the Son of God.

I hope you understand what I just explained. It should blow your mind. The story of the Trinity is that we have been brought into the life of the Trinity. By the Spirit, we have been joined with Christ, brought into union with him, and all that is true of Jesus is true of us. Including his place as the recipient of the love of the Father.

I have a feeling that the reason why so many of us live as spiritual orphans is because we have believed that the story of God is only about our sin, end of story. But that's selling the story short. There's so much more to this story. This isn't just about a cure to the cancer of sin, this is a story about transformation into super humans. The project of God isn't just to save us, but to make us his children, to make us like him.

If you still don't believe me, listen to this litany of verses.

2 Peter 1:4 says that we have become "partakers of the divine nature." 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." 1 John 3:2 tells us that, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." And finally the words of Jesus himself in John 17:22-23, "The glory

that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

Now do you understand why the Spirit is so vital? How can we be transformed, how can we have the divine life, unless the divine life is indeed in us, part of us, transforming us, making us like Jesus, joining us to him? How can we be sons and daughters of God, by any other way?

And Paul says that we enter into this relationship with the Spirit of adoption. Jewish culture didn't have adoption, but it was very common in Roman culture, which is almost certainly where Paul got the concept from. Roman families gave a lot of authority to the father. He essentially owned his household, and he even had the authority to put to death anyone in his household, though that didn't happen very often. Adoption in Roman culture wasn't necessarily about an orphan getting picked off the streets. It actually happened more commonly as a way for fathers to choose who would get their inheritance. So when a son got adopted, they were commonly adopted out of their family, into another family. That adoption meant that this person was now the responsibility of their new father, and all the responsibilities and privileges of that family now fell to the adopted son.

This actually happened to Caesar Augustus. He was adopted as Julius Caesar's son because Julius Caesar had no heir, and that's how Augustus became the emperor when Jesus was born. Regarding orphans, what was more common in that culture was for an orphan to find themselves in slavery.

So Paul sets up this contrast between slavery and adoption to show what kind of relationship we are now in. We aren't orphans who've been picked off the street to become slaves for a master, still living in fear. We are orphans who have gone from having no status at all, to being given the family name, the family responsibilities and privileges of the household of God. Now isn't it beautiful that Paul understands the difficulty we have grasping this, that we are prone to think and act like orphans, so he tells us that not only are we no longer orphans, but you are adopted children of a Father who loves you.

This is the kind of Father you say, “Abba, Father” to. Abba is Aramaic word that Jesus used when he prayed to God. It was the kind of things infants would babble, and it's a word of intimacy, of security.

When I come home from work and see my son Reed after a long day, he says to me, “Daddy, Daddy!” and comes running to me with his arms outstretched, laughing and giggling. Abba is a word that encapsulates that kind of freedom, joy, love, and security that Reed shows when he sees me come home from work. Reed doesn't worry about how to soothe himself, when he needs soothing he comes to me or his mother. When he needs to learn something, he asks us. When he needs anything, he asks for help. That's what “Daddy, Daddy” means. That's the way we are to understand our relationship to the Father. We are to become, as Jesus says, like little children.

My dad died when I was 11. I cried on two occasions: the night he died, and at the funeral when my aunt hugged me. Otherwise, I stifled my grief. I remember about a year later when someone said wasn't it so sad that I'd lost my dad, and I told them that it was no big deal, I was all right. I was probably 13, and that's what I thought. It obviously wasn't true. I'd lost someone who, for better or worse would have shaped my teenage years. I lost someone who could have been a source of wisdom, of security for me. And I didn't know that as a child, but I would come to know it in a dramatic fashion when I turned 20. That year, I was living in Texas, working the night shift for a missions agency. During the day I would have time to read my Bible and journal, and I would sneak away into a section of woods near where I lived. One day, as I was journaling, out of nowhere I began to weep. I don't know what I was reading, what I was writing, what I was thinking, I just began to cry like a baby. And I

couldn't stop. So I went into work, unable to stop the tears coming down my face. I sat at my desk and just felt the deepest sorrow and grief, I couldn't do anything but just cry. And I asked God, what is this about? And he showed me: I had never truly mourned my father. All the tears I had bottled up over the years, it was like God took a little pin and popped my swollen bag of grief and let me get it all out.

I am so grateful that he did that for me, because I was well on my way to being an orphan Christian. I was in danger of thinking that my spiritual life was one of toil, of trying my hardest, following the rules, doing the right thing, of hell on earth until I got to heaven. The spirit of fear, not of adoption. But it was the Spirit who did this to me, who popped my bubble of grief, and because I was awakened to the yearning that we all have for a heavenly Father who cares for us, I was also able to recognize that because the Spirit was doing his work in me, I knew I had a Father who cared for me.

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Remember that? Remember the connection? Because I see the work of the Spirit in my life, I know I have a Father who cares about me. When I really stop to think about the work of transformation the Spirit does in me, I'm blown away by the love of my heavenly Father. Daddy.

Don't you want that? Don't you want to be part of that kind of family? I believe we all have this yearning inside of us. We yearn for eternal security, for love. And because of the beautiful, mysterious work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we have that love.

The cry of Abba, Father, is a cry of prayer. Prayer, in fact, is one of the clearest ways by which we can recognize whether you're living as a spiritual orphan. What does your prayer life look like? Is it non-existent? Or when you pray, is it just a way of letting God put his stamp of approval on all you do already? Or do you pray in fear, thinking that this is the way to please an angry Father? Or... do you pray, "Abba, Father?"