

## Joint Heirs with Christ Jesus

St. Mark Lutheran  
Two services

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*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." Galatians 4:4-7*

A young man entered a movie theatre. He was loaded down with drinks, popcorn, and candy. The lights had just dimmed, and you know how it is when you leave the hall lights to enter a dark movie theatre? It is dark! He began to walk up and down the aisle, trying to see faces, trying to find the people with whom he had come. After several unsuccessful trips back and forth, he began to feel uneasy, and he finally stopped and called out loudly, "Does anyone here recognize me?"

We all want to belong. Some more, some less, but most people want to belong. We have a need to be in community. That's how God created us. It started all the way back in Genesis when God created Adam and Eve. In Genesis 2:18 God is quoted as saying, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." It was also God's will that man be fruitful and multiply. So it was that the community of a family was established by God on this earth, and this is very important in carrying out God's purposes.

But there are other types of community also. The first thing that Jesus did when he began his ministry was to gather a small circle of friends. This group would eventually become the leaders of his church. Yes, Jesus needed to train them, but they also became a community. They were close to one another. In fact, at the last supper, he told them all, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you..." On another occasion when Jesus was speaking to Peter, he said, "...thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) Here we see our Lord establishing another kind of family—a church family. This family is also very important in carrying out God's purposes.

How does one become a member of God's family? We need to have a spiritual transformation. Jesus explained it to Nicodemus in John 3:3 when he said, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) Two verses later he added, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." We need to have a spiritual rebirth to be a member of God's family.

How does God bring about this spiritual rebirth? The Holy Scriptures clearly tell us in 1 Peter 1:23: "you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God." We are born again by the Word of God.

Lutherans believe that a person can be born again at their baptism, no matter what the age of the child, because God's word is present and God's power is not limited because of his age. A person can also grow up not knowing the Lord and hear the word of God and believe. That's what happened in my family. Our family was not Christian; my mother heard the word of God preached on the Lutheran Hour for well over a year; and the time came when the Holy Spirit brought her to belief in Jesus Christ. She then followed the Lord's command to be baptized into Christ.

You see, we are not supposed to have one and neglect having the other. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...", and then he said in the same line, "...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you".

For those wanting reassurance that they are part of God's family and have been saved, Jesus gives it in Mark 16:16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Why is this possible? We read Paul's explanation in the Epistle reading in Galatians today: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God 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."

Another text from the Book of Romans puts it this way: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 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."

When we speak of adoption today, we speak about taking a child that is not your own flesh and blood and legally making them your own. But the Biblical meaning of adoption is probably closer to a ceremony that the Romans and Greeks had in at least one way. It was called "toga virilis" (vuh re lis) and it literally meant "the placing of a son". The child was not considered to be a full-fledged member of the family until this was done; he was still under the legal age of inheritance. They would take the toga off the back of the adult, and place it on the back of the child, and pronounce him to be a full-fledged member of the family with all of its rights and privileges.

There are similarities here with our adoption into the family of God. We are covered over also, with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. When that happens, we become a child of God. We are fully adopted and accepted children and joint heirs with Christ. It also says in Galatians 3:29 this morning: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

There is certainly at least one important difference between our adoption and the ceremony practiced by the Greeks and Romans. Their ceremony was only for young men; not so our adoption. Galatians 3 assures us of that when it says, "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 neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

We should rejoice when we think of our inheritance. Jesus says there is a place for us in heaven. We will experience life as we have never experienced it before. We are told that there will be no more sin and there will be no more death and that our life will be eternal. And there is more beyond that. It is written in the Holy Scriptures "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him..." (1 Cor. 2:9; Isaiah 64:4)

But don't forget one thing. As children of God, blessed with an unbelievable inheritance to come, there also comes a responsibility. God is still gathering members of his family. We have a part in that. We are the hands and feet of Christ at this time in history. The terrible attack in Orlando recently should be a reality check that reminds us that we are in a sin-sick world, that there are many who hate other people and are bent on destroying them, and that the children of God are involved in a great spiritual war against the forces of evil. The greatest evil of all is pretty much unseen and ignored by the world-the battle for the souls of men and women.

I'd like to ask you to do something important in the next twenty-four hours. Open your Bible to Ephesians, chapter 6, and read it through. It describes the armour that a Christian needs. We need to be equipped for the spiritual war that we are in. Then, motivated by the love of Jesus Christ, we are to be about our Father's business. Amen.