

Title: “Abba! Father!”

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Romans 8:15

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Service Readings: Is. 55:10–13; Rom. 8:12–17; Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23

Our Father in heaven.. We cry out to you, “Abba! Father!” for that is who you are.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans challenges our view of fatherhood. For within these short verses are a definition of what it means to be introduced into and then included in the family of God. Quite simply, it takes death and suffering. And when viewed from this perspective, is it any wonder that the world thinks we are foolish? But this is exactly what Paul writes in his letter this morning. Listen again to this passage:

¹²So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For 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. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For 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!” ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and 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.

To the world, what Paul prescribes is this: we must put to death the things of the flesh and suffer with Christ. Only then may we be glorified. And all the while, we do this willingly so that we can be adopted and can call God our father. The world would then ask, why would you want to call him Father after he forced you through all that? What is so inviting about all of this that we not just call him father but cry out “Abba! Father?” in heartfelt petition to him? It just doesn’t make any sense.

And so this morning I want to explore what it means to call God our father and juxtapose it with a worldly one. And I want to do this because not all of us had positive parental role models. And those who did not, or were even raised without one, this passage becomes that much more difficult to connect with. I’d like to start with a true story.

Keith Hernandez is one of baseball’s top players. He is a lifetime .300 hitter, recipient of several Golden Glove awards, and a batting champion for his average. He was also the MVP in his league and even the World Series. Yet, what he was missing was a father that accepted and recognized him. He said this once during an interview that he approached his father with this question. He asked, “Dad, I have a lifetime .300 batting average. What more do you want?” His father replied, “But someday you’re going to look back and say, ‘I could have done more.’”

Keith called this man his father but was it in title, only? That is what is before us this morning. You see, Keith had to call this man his father, for that is exactly what he was. But to Keith, this man may have been no more a real father to him than any other adult that clothed and provided for his needs. I cannot know for sure, but I imagine that he never looked upon this man and thought “Abba! Father!” You see,

this father looked to his son to find value in the relationship. And when his son couldn't meet that requirement, the relationship was impacted.

Now, this story is about Keith and his father, but we all have the same experiences to a lesser or greater degree. We all look upon our relationship with a father, or really with anyone, and expect that its health is dependent upon the effort that both people expend. And when one stops trying, the relationship is broken and typically falls apart. And it doesn't even take someone to stop trying. Think back on the relationships that have been strained, especially between you and your father, because of choices or actions that might have been made in good faith, but turned out to be a terrible choice? In our human nature, this is the reality of relationships and there is no alternative. We must be intentional about them, work at them, be forgiving in them, if they are to be sustained. And just because a relationship might be a parent/child, that doesn't change the work that must go into them, nor does it guarantee the outcome. We see it with Keith and his father, and I'm sure we can find countless examples in our own congregation. Did the father love his son, Keith? Probably. He may have had a terrible way of showing it, but there had to be some level of love. It may not be what Keith needed or expected but I'm thinking *some* bit of love was present.

Contrast that love with maybe a more typical example. A parent who will sacrifice for his child and his family. He knows their needs and he provides through his career and through his time spent with each of them. And if his child becomes ill or injured, he personally feels the pain and he may even cry out to God in petition to take upon himself what has been placed upon his child. He would do anything to ease his precious child's pain. But even here, the relationship can be strained. Even here it might require the father to be intentional about reminding himself that he does love his child, even in the midst of this situation. And so, this relationship is not all that different from Keith's. Relationships are work. And relationships are sensitive to the actions of each person.

But when we begin to consider the relationship between God and each of us, we have very little to compare it to, for human relationships are nothing more than a shadow of his relationship with us – and a fallen, sinful shadow at that. For God's love extends to all that he has created – regardless of how that creation looks upon him. His love doesn't become strained, he doesn't need to remind himself of his love for you when you act out of disobedience, or even when you turn away from him. His love is constant, it is full, it is complete, and it is forever. He knows the number of hairs on your head; he knitted you in your mother's womb. He has so much love for you and there is simply nothing you can do to impact that. You cannot make him love you less, nor can you make him love you more.

We know this; my message is not earth shattering, but sometimes we need to stop and remind ourselves of who loves us. Especially in a world where love is conditional, we tend to measure it based on our merits. And when we do this, we always find that we have failed. I look back on my relationship with my wife, with my children, with others, and I can find countless examples of where I failed them, and where they required intentional love towards me.

But this is not how God loves us. It *should* be. For we don't deserve his love. But it is not how it *is*. And I would like to pause here to consider for a moment who God is. So often, especially in messages like these, I tend to fall back on my human nature and view him as someone who is like us, but just perfect and with more powers. But he is nothing like that! Consider for a moment who he is. He is God, the one who created an entire universe and everything in it. Why would he even *care* about a relationship with us? What could he possibly hope to gain from that? Now add to that the reality that when his creation turned against him, became an enemy of his, he didn't destroy us but continued to love us: he sent his

son as an offering, even though we were against any restoration. You see, he continued to love us in spite of our hatred for him. Now, add to *even that...* he desires to not just be a disconnected, unreachable God who cares for his creation, he desires to be considered a father, *the father, the father above all other fathers*. How can we even begin to wrap our minds around this reality?

But this *is* the reality. He *is* our father and desires us to look upon him as such. He doesn't demand it, he won't force it, but it is his will that we look upon him with the same love that he looks upon us. So much so, that he sends the Holy Spirit to us so that our hearts can turn towards him and understand all that he has done for our sake. For while we were still sinners, he sent Jesus to the cross to be our savior – to take our sins and receive the punishment for them. That is worth repeating. Our God, the one we call Father, sent *his son* into this world to die for the sins of all. And through that activity he made a way for each one of us to share in this propitiation – this reconciliation. For through baptism we share in the death of Jesus so that we can share in his victory. And this promise, this hope that we have becomes even more secure because God adopts us into his family. We become a son or daughter. We become an heir and are promised an inheritance. You see, we can take hold of the promise of our own salvation because we have a father, *the father* who has worked everything out for us. And we can live in the assurance that he holds us in the palm of his hand and continues to love us and call us his own. Abba Father, indeed.

Please pray with me.

Lord God, we stand before you in awe because of who you are. We can do nothing but receive your love and Lord we ask that you continue send the Holy Spirit to empower us to share this message of love to all those we meet.

Amen.