

This sermon was preached for the symposium worship service by Pastor James R. Huebner, Grace, Milwaukee

Romans 8: 11-17

<sup>11</sup> *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.* <sup>13</sup> *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,* <sup>14</sup> *because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* <sup>15</sup> *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”* <sup>16</sup> *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.* <sup>17</sup> *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.*

My brothers in Christ:

You pound the pavement for weeks, invite and invite, and still no one shows up for Bible information class. You listened to her. You listened to him. You finally got them both together, not once but several times. You called again and again for another follow-up meeting only to find out they filed for divorce. You follow the encouragement from the circuit pastor to increase your congregation’s CMO to a solid percentage of total offerings, which means you get to go home and tell your wife that there will not even be a cost of living increase for your salary for the third year in a row.

Ever had even an ounce of wondering why you keep banging your head on the wall and seem to be getting nowhere in ministry? We’re not into numbers and statistics. We know God will bless faithful efforts in his own time and in his own way, but, when congregational and synodical stats keep skidding, do you ever sense even a gram of worry about the future? Take heart! The One who created our life, the One who has opened the door for our eternal life, the One who has called us into ministry is also the One who gives meaning to our life and ministry. That is what the apostle Paul impresses on us in the second lesson today:

### “GOD GIVES MEANING TO OUR MINISTRY”

- (We are):
- I. Adopted by the Father (15b,16b)
  - II. Heirs with the Son (17)
  - III. Led by the Spirit (11-16)

#### I.

Think of some of the great messages you have received – propping yourself on one knee with perspiration running down your side as you ask her to be your life-partner, trying to remain calm as the president of the synod reads the list of candidates on Assignment Day, waiting by the phone to hear if the bank will approve the home loan. Then the news breaks. She said, “Yes!” You have received a divine call. The house is yours. You could put all those great messages together, and they still would not come close to the wonder of this message from the apostle – we **received the spirit of sonship** (15b); when we speak to God, we **cry, “Abba, Father,”** (15b); we **are God’s children** (16b). The heavenly Father has adopted us into his family.

We can better understand the impact of that announcement when we recall that according to Roman law the adoption process had big-time legal ramifications. First, the adopted person was literally and absolutely the child of a new family. That would be especially good news if the old family was evil or abusive. Even debts were canceled. Secondly, the adopted person became an heir of his new father’s estate. Even if there were natural children, he was a co-heir with them.

From the moment we first inhaled the air molecules of this planet, we were spiritual orphans, lost in sin. And, although, we don’t want to admit it –this is what makes getting together with brothers in ministry both

comforting and uncomfortable because, while we share similar challenges and can encourage one another, too many of us know each other too well, which includes all the dirt from our past. Then you run into your former dean, and you know he knows stuff about you which you don't want anyone else to know. But he doesn't know half the stuff that was going on in your mind back then. As brothers in ministry we greet one another, but we're thinking, "I know what he's really like. Worse, he knows what I'm really like." Then we realize, "God knows even more," and with his holy eye he sees us for what we are by nature, scummy street urchins.

But God has adopted us. He says, "I am your true Father. No matter what kind of earthly father you have had, no matter if he was strict or lax, abusive or attentive, cold or caring, no matter if our earthly father is alive and well or dead and gone, I will be your perfect and permanent Father!" While many in our world today wander like orphans searching for meaning in life and wonder, "Where do I fit in?" our search is over because God himself has adopted us into his spiritual and eternal family through the splashing of water droplets miraculous mixed with the Father's forgiveness. Doesn't this past miracle give a whole new meaning to our life and our ministry? You and I aren't nobodies. You and I have an identity. We are adopted by the Father and are children of God!

## II.

Two little children were kidnapped. An evil gang contacted their father and demanded a ransom payment. He asked, "How much?" When they told him an unbelievable price, he didn't bat an eyelash but went to work to find the sum and pay it. His kids meant that much to him.

God desperately wants us to be his sons and his daughters. He wants that so much that he paid the highest ransom price imaginable in order to free us from the Satan's gang and to accomplish our full and complete adoption. You know full well that none of us can pay a high enough price for that adoption to take place. God took a look at us – lost, helpless, poverty-stricken, dirty, undeserving, scummy street urchins – and said, "There's no way you can ever be part of my family unless I pay the ransom." The price that it would cost? You also know full well what it is – the lifeblood of God's eternal Son. Paul accents the role of God's eternal Son in giving meaning to our life and ministry when he states, "**Now if we are children [of God], then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, since we share in his sufferings**" (17). "**We share in his sufferings.**" Think of what that means? It means that everything Christ has done and earned becomes ours. Jesus lived as the perfect person we ought but cannot be. He allowed himself to be condemned and crucified even though he never did a single thing wrong. There he was, his life draining away for people who didn't deserve to be his slaves much less his brothers and sisters. But Jesus did it all and did it all for us. God now looks at us and says, "Welcome to my family!" All the implications apply. Our old ties to the devil and his gang are completely broken. The ransom has been completely paid. Because of what Jesus did, we are not only literally and absolutely children in God's family.

And there's more. Much more. Paul says that we are also heirs of the heavenly Father's estate, co-heirs with Christ. What do you expect to inherit from your parents? From what we learned yesterday, I hope nothing. I hope that in gratefulness for what Jesus has done they will all to the Lord's work.. Just remember that whatever earthly possessions we have or inherit, we won't be able to take them with us into eternity. So, we might as well give joyfully and generously as we are learning in these symposium presentations. But there is something we get to keep – an eternal inheritance. Paul says, "**We will also share in his glory**" (17). While we may at times bewail the deteriorating situation of our congregation or synod, we can be confident that there is another world far better awaiting us. Doesn't this future miracle give a whole new meaning to our life and our ministry? We are heirs with Christ of all the good things God has in store for his children.

## III.

The adoption ceremony in Roman times was carried out in the presence of several witnesses. If the adopting parents died, and there was some dispute about the right of the adopted child to inherit, one or more of the witnesses stepped forward and swore that the adoption was true and that the adoption papers were genuine. In this way the rights and privileges of the adopted person were assured and guaranteed.

Paul writes, "**Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children**" (14-16). The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God's children through the true, reliable, unerring adoption papers, the Holy Scriptures. And when we study those adoption papers, the Holy Spirit assures us that all the blessings of being in God's family apply to each of us personally right now (as listed in this same chapter of Paul's letter) – **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (8:1); when we do not know what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us (8:26); **in all things God works for the good of those who love him** (8:28); **we are more than conquerors through him who loved us** (8:37); **nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in**

**Christ Jesus our Lord** (8:39). Any wonder why we encourage one another, “Keep your nose in the Bible.” I’ve heard it said, “Pastors should be studying the Bible devotionally in addition to studying it professionally for sermons and Bible classes.” I understand the concern behind that encouragement, but how can you study for a sermon or Bible class without that study being devotional? This is the tool, the only tool the Spirit uses. These are the adoption papers that give meaning to our life and ministry.

A king put his son in the army. As the soldiers were about to go off to war, the son said, “I’m afraid, father. I’m afraid to face the enemy. I’m afraid I won’t be able to support my fellow soldiers. I’m afraid of letting you down.” The king looked at his son and said, “In every instance just remember who you are.”

Fears? Fear in ministry? Walking up the sidewalk to that prospect’s home, you silently mumbling a prayer, “Dear Lord, make it so they aren’t home.” You dial up that inactive member, and they don’t pick up. “Whew! They’re not home. At least I can tell the elders I tried.” You’re afraid you’ll say too much at a meeting or say too little. How about being afraid to stare down that pet sin and wondering, “To whom can I unload this?” Then you see the stack on your desk and feel afraid you won’t be able to do everything and won’t be able to live up to people’s expectations. That’s when the Holy Spirit says, “Remember who you are!” He has implanted a spiritual nature in us so that we have the battery pack, recharged by God’s promises daily and by this faith-feeding feast, in order to carry out ministry in joy and confidence in spite of all the devil’s tricks. **The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you ... Therefore, friends, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live** (11-13). Doesn’t this present miracle give a whole new meaning to our life and our ministry? Led by the Spirit we can actually do great things for God, his people, his church.

He was only in his twenties, but life hardly seemed worth living. His mother had died before he finished grade school. Although his father was still living, he hadn’t seen him in years. His siblings hated him. He had been abducted and taken to a foreign country. He couldn’t speak the language and was forced into slavery. Based on trumped-up, false charges he was jailed without a trial. All he knew were the four smelly walls, the slop the guards called food, and the rats. You know the young man. His name was Joseph. Who could blame him if he sat in his cell each day and mumbled, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen”?

I doubt if any of us would claim that our ministry woes are on the Joseph-level. Yet, there are veteran pastors who would be willing to tell the seminarians here today that sometimes pastoral ministry is just plain hard. There are pastors here today who have faced incredible challenges in ministry. Yesterday Pastor Valleskey mentioned that it would be a difficult thing to turn a one hundred fifty year old church around. That may be true. But I’m sure he would agree with me that it can be done. A one hundred fifty year old congregation can be turned around. For that matter, a one hundred fifty-seven year old church body can be turned around – and if not in our lifetime, then we’ll die trying. Why? Because God gives meaning to our ministry. How? By laying on our hearts the simple truths before us today. We are adopted by the Father, heirs with the Son, and led by the Spirit. Go and serve the Lord with joy! Amen.