

Dec. 27, 2009: First Sunday after Christmas, Year C. Isaiah 61:6:10-62:3, Psalm 147:13-21, Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7, John 1:1-18. The Rev. Deacon Marcia Tyriver

We've just heard Paul tell the Galatians that God the Father **adopts us as children,**

that God the Father gives our hearts the Spirit of his Son, and that this Spirit causes us to cry-out as a trusting, adoring child who recognizes and wants to be with a beloved parent. "Abba! Father!"

Abba is an Aramaic word from the common every-day language of Jesus's day. It was used when the relationship with one's father was close, deep, and personal. Scholars used to say it was equivalent to "papa" or even "daddy".

It is not a formal or liturgical word. *Father* is used in the sense of God being the absolutely sovereign creator of all. ([www/christianleadershipcenter.org/otws12.htm](http://www.christianleadershipcenter.org/otws12.htm))

"*Abba! Father!*" are the words of a little child who trusts and feels absolutely secure in the presence of a loving and trustworthy parent-figure.

This reminds me of what was for me a stunning experience I had recently with my 3-yr. old grand-daughter Amelia.

It was a few days after her mom came home with the new baby, Ian. Mom was exhausted and busy nursing the newborn in a different room.

Amelia was in her own room, supposedly settling-down for an afternoon nap or quiet time. However, she had been crying for about 20 minutes, and was becoming more and more upset.

So I went into her room, simply gathered her in my arms, wrapped her "blankie" around her, and sat down with her in my lap.

Instantly relieved, she stopped crying. I was surprised when immediately I felt her whole body go limp. She melted in my arms, her head on my shoulder, and fell securely and peacefully asleep within 3 seconds. It was amazing! I will never forget her weakness, her vulnerability, her need, and her absolute trust...and how thoroughly she was comforted so simply.

“Abba! Father!”

Another significant word we heard Paul use today is the word *adopted*. He says that through Jesus we are redeemed and *adopted* as God’s child.

This word *adoption* was never used in the Old Testament, and Jesus didn’t use it.

But Paul used it 5 times in his letters. Paul was a Roman citizen, and adoption was part of Roman culture and practice. A wealthy Roman man needed a male heir to whom he could pass on his inheritance and legacy.

The newly adopted son renounced all claims to his previous family and accepted the new father’s absolute and total control of his life. **Our** legacy as God’s children is that we know we are loved, we are called to love one-another, we have heaven not only here on earth, but we have the promise of eternal life.

(www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_adoption.htm)

The contemplative teacher & monastic, Thomas Merton, calls this being adopted as a child of God our *true self*. All our other identifications and ideas about ourself are not as important as our **true self**. Certainly our individual identification **is** necessary and important, but compared to the importance of *knowing* our true self as an adopted child of God, all other identities are like a *false self*.

As a child of God there is nothing between God and us...unless we put it there. It is what Jesus called being “born again”. It’s a change in our relationship with God. Jesus said “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (John 3:3-6, NIV)

Think about the parable of the Prodigal Son.

One wise and learned person has observed that **all** the saints have in common the attitude of the wayward Prodigal Son as he returned home. He was at his wits’ end and in defeat. He returned to present to his father the mess he’d made of his life. The Prodigal Son was empty of pride and ready to accept whatever his father said or did. He just hoped he’d be taken back, perhaps as a slave-like laborer. But what does he see **instead** as he approaches? He sees his father running toward him with welcoming, open arms. How do you suppose the Son felt? Humbled? Grateful? Certainly his heart cried- out “Abba! Father!” (Robert Llewelyn, *The Joy of the Saints: Spiritual Readings throughout the Year*, p. x)

In today’s scriptures both John and Paul called us children. But how do you **feel** being called a *child*?

Being a child of God doesn’t mean we are baby-like. In fact, John’s words which we heard today called children of God “enlightened” and powerful. John said, “...to all who received...(Christ), who believed in his name, he gave **power** to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1: 9-13, NRSV)

And if we don’t come down to this point of the simplicity of a child in the lap of Abba, Father, ...every day and many times every day...we are doomed to miss-out on so much of life. That certainly happens to me! We will be caught-up instead

on a treadmill of our own self-deception, self-importance, our own efforts, our own ignorance, our own emotional addictions, or substance addictions, our own pride, our own worries.

Today's scriptures present us frequently with the paradox of strength in the presence of weakness. The little weak babe born in a manger is really our powerful King. There's also the paradox that the King was crucified, and yet his self-sacrifice in powerful love is gradually changing the whole course of history and human understanding.

There's the paradox of adults becoming children of God...that our dying to self is necessary before we can be born again in the Spirit.

In knowing our weakness as well as God's mysterious strength, we can be enlightened.

Only with humility can we bear his power. In the words of popular culture, we can then bring "Christmas magic".

We can, as Isaiah says today, be clothed with garments of "salvation" and with a "robe of righteousness" and be "vindicated". We can "be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of ...God." (Isaiah 62:3, NRSV)

The Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor spoke about this paradox of strength in apparent weakness.

Referring to us as being "sent out" by God, she said we are sent out "with nothing at all and (yet) with **everything** we need:

healing, forgiveness, restoration, resurrection.

Those are the only things we really have to share with the world,

which is just as well,
since they are the only things the world really needs.”

(Barbara Brown Taylor, from her book *Bread of Angels* as quoted on Sojourners' website 12/16/09)

To put it simply,
come, put yourself in his arms and sink into the security of being enfolded by His Love. Come in any condition, at any time, in any place, and be enfolded by His love. Abba! Father!

Are you grieving? Are you lonely? Are you harried and busy? Are you afraid, worried? Or are you so thankful and filled with joy that you have nowhere else to turn to receive as complete an embrace as His love?

St. Augustine of Hippo said in perhaps the third century A.D. that it is as if our hearts have a hole in them. The hole is God-shaped, and we are never satisfied until we let God come into the hole and fill our heart.

Strength in our weakness.

The child made secure.

The child of God made powerful.

Adopted by God.

I'd like to close with a verse near the end of Psalm 131:

“...I still my soul and make it quiet,

like a (weaned*) child upon its mother's breast;

my soul is quieted within me.” (Book of Common Prayer, p. 785)(*NIV)

There is wisdom and strength in crying-out to God, as would a child, “Abba! Father!”