Why Do We Call God Father? – Father’s Day

John 14:8-14 Kimby Young

Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-7 June 18, 2017

In preparation for this Father’s Day, I’ve been thinking about what makes a good father. My father is one of the best of the best. I imagine many of you would say the same – knowing some of your fathers. Of course, some of our fathers have flaws – and some of those flaws are significant. If you had to think about what makes a good father – what might those qualities be – loving, caring, present, taking an active part in his children’s lives, teaching skills and attitudes and values, providing care and security. For some humor and a positive attitude are essential. For me, of course, demonstrating faithfulness and living a strong relationship with God are the mark of a good parent. If you had to make a list of what makes a good father, you could probably come up with a list. Then, you would probably measure your father against that list – or yourself if you are a parent.

Throughout the Bible, God has many names. Yahweh, Elohim, Adonai – are 3 of the most popular. Sometimes the names are more about attributes – Almighty, Gracious, Righteous, Holy One, Mysterious, Powerful, Loving, Comforter. Throughout the Bible Father is one of the most consistent names for God. Abba in the Hebrew – carried into the New Testament by Jesus. Jesus calls God Father more than any other name. In the gospel of John alone the word father is used 109 times. I began to think about why we call God Father – why is that a favorite address. Of course, it has nothing to do with masculinity or maleness – those are purely human traits. God is not a man, or a woman. But God has characteristics that are both masculine and feminine. Gender roles are too limiting to capture all that God is. We know that – God is not human. But sometimes to understand God, we describe God using human terms. Thus the name Father has become so important to us – because it describes God in very personal, intimate, close relational terms. God is not only like a good father, God is a good father. And as I’ve mentioned before, God is also known as mother. The closest human relationship is between parent and child. No one loves us like a father loves us, or like a mother loves us – a good parent is devoted to a child and will do anything for that child. So it is with God. God created us. God adores us. God provides for us. God teaches us and wants us to be the best that we can be. God is our loving Father – in the most personal and connected ways we can imagine.

In the readings for today from Galatians there is an even deeper meaning to the term Father – Abba – as used for God. It’s not just intimacy and connection. The author of the letter to the Galatians uses the term “Father” to talk about adoption and inheritance. The author points out that Jesus is the son of God, the firstborn, the beloved, the heir to all that is, in all of creation. Jesus was fully human, but as the reading from John for today reminds us, Jesus is also fully divine. Jesus and God are one and the same. If we want to understand God who cannot be seen – then we look to Jesus who can be seen. We see God when we look at Jesus’ life – his teaching, his miracles, his healing, his call for justice and fairness, his care for the world and for all people. We see God when we see Jesus. We also see what God wants humanity to be as we look at Jesus – this firstborn of all creation. We see the best that humans can be. In Jesus, we see how we are called to live and love.

The author of Galatians points out that though Jesus was born of God – son of God – and unique in all creation, We are also children of God – sons and daughters of God. We are adopted by God – children of God in every sense and nature of the word. God is truly our Father in every way that matters. In legal terms in that day – the author is saying we are true heirs of all that belongs to God. We are heirs of the kingdom of God. We inherit all the gifts and the blessings, the challenges and the expectations of true children of God. Heirs in that day were to carry on the family legacy, the family business, the family name, the family honor. So as children of God – we are chosen to carry on God’s work in the world – Christ’s work of caring and compassion, justice and mercy. We are meant to run the family business – to do God’s work in the world here and now. You are children of God – heirs of God.

Adoption is one of the most loving gifts the world has ever known. To be adopted – to be chosen – means that love does not know any boundaries. Love is absolute and overwhelming. Love is unlimited and cannot be stopped. This is the love we have received from God our Abba, Father. The love that chose us – though undeserved. The love that pulled us out of darkness or slavery or emptiness and filled us with life and light and hope and promise. God loves you so much – that God will reach into the world to find you. God will follow you when you don’t know where you are. And God will call you home again, and again, and again. We belong to God. We are God’s children, God’s heirs – fully beloved and fully gifted by grace. This is not an accident of biology, this is the choice of a loving God who wants desperately to be with you, who promises to give you whatever you need, an open door to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says at the end of the reading from John “If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” “God will do it.” Anything.

Friends, children of God, beloved in Christ, hear this good news today and every day. You are God’s chosen one. You are God’s heir. You are adopted into God’s family and given all that you will ever need. You are loved. So live as God’s beloved child in the world, and give thanks.

Amen.