

The Test

A Series on the Letter to the Galatians

Message 5 – “Do You Look Like Your Parents?”

Galatians 3:26-4:7

St. Paul’s United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown

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Well, good morning! Grace and peace to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ in this time of worship, St. Paul’s Church! We’re together! Whether here in person; or, online watching in the comfort of your home; or, watching alone online or in a room, or together in a crowded room, or whether you’re reading this on paper - we are so grateful that you chose to worship together with us today.

My name is David Woolverton and I’m one of the pastors here. It’s an honor for me to share with you God’s message for us today. Before we get into that message, I feel pressed on my heart just to give you a word of encouragement today. Many of us are facing into challenges that we did not count on. It’s been a season of change; it’s been a season of transition for many of us. It’s been a challenge, I know from the standpoint of church, trying to reconfigure what worship looks like, but some of you who are here in this room and some of you who have been watching us online, some of you have been significantly impacted. Several of you may have lost your jobs or have lost some levels of employment. Some of you have been really challenged financially. Some of you have faced into some pretty significant grief and loss, where loved ones have gone home to be with the Lord. And some of you are facing really challenging diagnoses and health crises. Throughout all of what you are facing, I want you to know that God’s got this. He’s got you. He’s got you in the palm of His hands, as we read in scripture especially in the book of Isaiah, that God has etched our names in the palm of His hands (**Isaiah 49:16**).

I want you to know that God’s got you. He’s got us. No matter what it is that we’re facing, no matter what struggles we’re going through, no matter what hardships we are facing, we need to know: God’s got us. And perhaps this word today that comes to us from Paul’s letter to the Galatians is just the word that God is wanting to speak into your heart and mind.

So, I want to encourage you to set aside all of the distractions, all of the things that might bog you down. Whether it’s personal or corporate or what’s going on in our country or our globe, just set it all aside for just a few moments. And let’s listen, as God speaks a very important word into each

and every one of our hearts. As we prepare for that, would you join with me in prayer?

Gracious Lord, I pray that You would open us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Lord, teach us what you would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. All of this Lord we pray in Jesus' name.

Well, as we jump into today's message, I gotta' ask you this question.... it's kind of a fun question. My question is.....

Do you look like your parents?

Let me show you a couple of images. Here's a father and a son who look



almost like identical. Or how about this one?



These are parents and children who's kids are actually posed to look like the posing of their parents but, they look identical, right?

I don't know if those were planned or not... but I have another question. Maybe you don't look physically like your parents but, do you act like your parents? Are there things that you do that remind you of what your parents did? In the room I see some heads nodding - in the online community I see some heads nodding as well. I'm sure that each of us has that moment in time when words come out of our mouths that sound just like Mom or Dad, right? Or things that we do that we actually learned from watching our parent's behavior. We give thanks to the genetics, but not everybody in this room and not everybody online watching is blessed enough to have biological parents. Maybe, you were adopted or even if you were not adopted maybe some of you wish you were adopted. Adoption, it's one of the beautiful facets of the letter to the Galatians that Paul brings before us.

It's the concept of how God adopted us. Pastor Matt, over the last two weeks, introduced the concept of adoption in Galatians chapter 3. What I want to do today is kind of go back a little bit into chapter 3 in the last few verses and use that as a springboard into Galatians chapter 4. But to do so, we have to understand what Paul is talking about when he uses the term adoption. Now, I have a very dear, dear friend. He and his wife made a decision a couple of years ago that they wanted to adopt, so they have been processing through all of the paperwork and going through all of the hurdles in order to adopt a child from China. And, just relatively recently they got approved, everything got approved and they are now just waiting for the pandemic to lift the restrictions so that they can go fly to China and retrieve this beautiful little girl. But I was talking with this friend of mine just a couple of weeks ago and he said something just in the casual conversation that I don't know if he realized it, but these old ears of mine tuned in and grabbed ahold of pretty quickly. He said, "my daughter" referring to this child that they had adopted in China, even though he has not yet physically met her! But already, by his words he has grafted her into his family and into his heart.

And I am sure his wife has done the same. This little girl has already been adopted emotionally as part of my friend's family. That's an important understanding of adoption, when we look at how God has adopted each and every one of us. And it's to that understanding that I want to draw our attention as we go before the Lord in the Lord's word to chapter 3 of Galatians. Paul writes,

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-28)

So I want to park there on those verses for just a few moments, and let's look just a little bit more closely at what Paul is actually saying. He says here, "*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.*" This is so important. What Paul is saying to those Galatian believers is that their connection to the heart of God, their adoption as children of God, is not just based on their verbally accepting Christ in that moment when they said "Yes" to Jesus. However important that that was. What Paul is saying to them is that their adoption was not based on their action at all. But rather, on the action of Jesus, who died on a cross for them. You see, that moment in history when Jesus died on the cross and then three days later was raised to new life, they become the pivotal moment in all of history where our adoption was solidified. So, before God in metaphoric language, met the physical US - he already grafted us into His family. And before those Galatian Christians, said "Yes" to Jesus, what God did in taking the first step by initiating this process of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, He took the step to adopt us in advance. We were grafted into God's family.

It's a wonderful, wonderful powerful truth that Paul was trying to communicate to these early believers. Why was this so important? If you remember from a couple of weeks ago, we introduced the concept that the Galatians, these young believers, were a church that was planted by the apostle Paul, nurtured by him and as Paul left the community, a group of individuals known as the Judaizers came on the scene and the Judaizers were individuals who confused those Galatian believers by saying, "What Paul taught you as the gospel, was all fine and good, but it wasn't enough." "Jesus was not enough," they said. "You need Jesus plus" - you need to be circumcised, (which we're gonna' talk about in a couple of weeks.) AND you need to follow certain rules and rituals that were part of the Jewish Law of Moses in order for you to be saved. So, it's not about Jesus alone - which is what Paul was saying; they were correcting Paul, saying, "you need Jesus plus." And so, Paul comes back in this letter and he says, all of that is wrong. See, God took the initiative and what God did in sending His own Son Jesus to die on the cross, that was all you need. So, the crucifixion and the resurrection were the markers in the midst of history, in the midst of each and every one of our lives. Those were the markers of God adopting us and placing us into His family. Then He takes it up a little bit more, he says,

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Such that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave

nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:27-28)

What he's saying is that it doesn't matter, all of those distinctions: every single one of us, every one of us has a unique personality; every one of us has distinct idiosyncrasies. Every morning when I get up and look in the mirror, I know I am looking at someone with many idiosyncrasies. But when God looks at each and every one of us, He doesn't see Male/Female, Jew/Gentile, Slave/Free, why? Because at the foot of the cross we're all His children, we're all God's children, dearly loved. Dearly embraced. He saw us as **Psalm 139:16** tells us, He saw us while we were yet in our mother's womb. And when God saw us, even before we were born, (in the metaphor) He looked out and He said, "Now there's a beautiful thing. I want him, I want her in my family."

We've been adopted and that adoption is rooted in the event of the cross and the empty tomb. But Paul doesn't stop there, he continues, he says "We're all in this together." Of course, that's my language, not his. That's actually the phrase or the cheer of our society right now, in this time "We're all in this together" it's the mantra of the pandemic and I get why we hear that all the time in society, don't you? It's kind of our way of rallying the troops to make this all work. We can do this as long as we're doing it together. It's almost like for those of us who are watching or who are in this room who are from Penn State territory, whenever you hear the phrase: "We Are..." what do you say? "Penn State!" yeah, it's a rallying cry, it's an identity cry.

What Paul was saying to the Galatians is that we're all in this together, but he even takes it another step further and he says, "We're family!" "We're siblings!" "We're children of Almighty God!" That means that those of you who are in this room, those of you who are watching online, those of you who are looking into the camera right now, each and every one of us is a dearly loved child of the Most High God.

And we're siblings with one another, because we're a family. And then Paul says, not only did God adopt you, He's taking it one step further, he says in verse 29,

If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29)

What's he talking about? Paul doesn't stop just at the cross as that historical moment in time, Paul goes even further back, he traces our identity in Christ all the way back to Abraham in the early chapters of the

book of Genesis. It was to Abraham that God said, "Hey, Abraham, I want you to look up into the heavens and try to count the stars. It's impossible right? I'm going to make your descendant's number like the number of the stars in the sky." (**Genesis 15:5**) And there's a reason, He says, "I'm going to bless you in order for you to be a blessing to the world." (**Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8**)

What Paul in writing to the Galatians does is that he says to those Galatian believers "Your moment of saying "Yes" to Jesus connected you to a promise that was rooted all the way back to the beginning of time."

Right now, watching this video, watching this service, I'm sure there's somebody who is saying "I don't feel that connection to God's promise." In fact, statistically I would venture to say that there may even be somebody who's watching today who's contemplated suicide. Because for you, you don't know if you want a tomorrow. I'm here to tell you that not only does God see you as precious, but he sees you as His dearly beloved child and you have been part of a promise that traces all the way back in time to the very beginning. And not only do you have a tomorrow, but you are destined to carry that promise as a blessing to the world.

You have been adopted and you are precious to your Heavenly Father. So much so that Paul says we are heirs. Heirs - H.E.I.R.S. that means we stand to inherit the abundant eternal life that God has freely given to all who are known as His children. We're heirs. Paul says in verse 4 of chapter 4,

*But when the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law to redeem those under the Law that we might receive adoption as children (**Galatians 4:4**)*

Do you know what this is? Around Christmastime every year you hear us pastor types using theological words like "Incarnation." Now, the incarnation is a theology word we use to talk about God becoming flesh, God coming down and being born as a human being, being subjected to all the limitations of humanity in order for Jesus to redeem those who are caught in those limitations. That word "redeem" is a legal word in the original language and it means to buy back. To buy back. So what God is saying is that Jesus, on the cross has bought back those who were once slaves under the Law so that they could become heirs, heirs as children. So, he pushes the metaphor a bit further in verse 6, he says,

*Because you are His children, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father!" (**Galatians 4:6**)*

The word "Abba" is Aramaic, Aramaic is like a dialect of Hebrew and in Aramaic the word Abba literally translates in intimacy as "Daddy". Daddy! So, as children of God, the Holy Spirit within each of us allows us to approach God with that kind of intimacy.

How many of us have ever in prayer referred to God as Daddy? That's the level of intimacy Paul says we have now. Because we're children of God, we can approach God with that level of intimacy. When we were under the Law, we didn't have that intimacy. Under the Law he says as it continues in verse 7,

We were slaves, but now we are no longer a slave. We're God's children. And since we are His children, God has made us an heir
(Galatians 4:7)

We're heirs! What Paul is talking about here is really the challenge that he's issuing to the Galatians that pits Religion vs. a Relationship. He's in effect saying "Do you want a religion? Do you want a whole bunch of rules and regulations and rituals that define who you are or do you want a relationship with God that's based on intimacy, that's based on being a child, a son or daughter of the Heavenly Father?" And what Paul says, in effect is that right now "You know God, God knows you, therefore why are you turning your back on all of what you have received? Why are you turning back to those old ways?" He says, "Do you wish to be enslaved to them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years, I fear for you that somehow I wasted my efforts on you." In other words, what Paul is saying is, "Why do you want to go back to the old way? Why do you want to be slaves or servants to the Law? When you now can live in the freedom as grace as heirs?" Why is this important to us? There are way too many of us in the Church of Jesus Christ today who are choosing to live under the religion and we're missing the freedom and the grace of being children of God in full intimacy with the God who loves us. So, I have to ask, are we willing to reflect the image of our Heavenly Father? Each and every one of us is unique, every one of us has a unique personality, every one of us has wonderful gifts and even in our foibles, God sees all of that, everything about us and He loves us dearly and He wants the preciousness of who we are to be a part of that family.

God has adopted you. So why would we want to go back? Do you reflect the image of your Heavenly Father? Do you "look like" God? Do you act like Jesus? I don't know about you, but that humbles me.... that is such a daunting task. But here's the thing, when God adopted us He gave us His Spirit. And it's His Holy Spirit in us that bears the image that we're to reflect.

So, maybe the place to start is simply to ask,

Do we love like Jesus?

Maybe that's where we have to start. Maybe that's where we have to start. Because God wants us to reflect His image, and we need to look like Jesus. Will you pray with me?

God, it is so hard for us to imagine looking like You, reflecting Jesus, when the image we have of ourselves is not always the image You'd have of us. Help us to see You in one another. Help us to see ourselves in the mirror of Your Word. Help us to embrace Your embrace of us. Lord, we love You, thank You for adopting us and for reminding us that we are part of an amazing family. All of this we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.