

July 19, 2026—The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. James Wyatt

The Spirit of Adoption

Do you remember the first time you became aware that different families do things differently? Like, for one example, I remember in elementary school becoming aware that a couple of students in my class didn't celebrate Christmas, which is about the full extent of my understanding of what it meant to be Jewish at that time. A few years later on, it affected me in a much more direct way when I was at my best friend's house for dinner and one of their family rules was that you had to eat the food on your plate. This was not a rule at my house! If we didn't like something, we just didn't eat it. So much to my chagrin, his parents forced me, to eat one canned green bean. I didn't like the look of it, I didn't like the smell of it, and oh, the taste was pretty nasty. But I had to eat the whole thing.

Families have their own ways of doing things, right? And in fact, that's one of the challenges that just about every newlywed couple or new roommates has to deal with—each of them has their own ideas about how households do things, and they have to work together to figure out how their new household is going to do things, what rules, what practices, what beliefs and values they're going to cherish and celebrate together.

I got thinking about that because of our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans this morning. The community of Jesus-followers in Rome that Paul was writing to was in the thick of trying to figure out a similar sort of issue. Part of that community came from a Jewish background. They were children of Abraham and heirs of God's covenant with Abraham, which God reaffirmed to Isaac and then to Jacob in our Genesis reading this morning—they were already part of God's people, and they had learned to see their tradition through a new lens because of their encounter with Jesus. But then another part of that same community did not come from a Jewish background. They might have come from all over, they might have worshipped any of hundreds of different gods before, but their encounter with Jesus led them to worship the God of Jesus. And they were still working on figuring out exactly what that meant for them. These two parts of the community were a lot like a newlywed couple trying to figure out how their new family would do things—what traditions and beliefs and values would hold sway in their new household. So it was primarily to that non-Jewish part of the community that Paul was writing in the section of his letter we heard this morning. Previously, they belonged to other nations and served other gods. But when they were baptized and joined this community of Jesus-followers, Paul says to them, God adopted them. They became children of God, adopted into a new family and brought into a new way of doing things.

Friends, "you have received a spirit of adoption," too, and in just a few minutes we're going to renew our own baptismal covenant as we welcome Danny into the household of God through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. We're going to reaffirm the way our family does things—the beliefs and values that we cherish and celebrate. In this family, we continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. In this family, we resist evil, and we proclaim the Good News by word and example. In this family, we seek and serve Christ in all persons, and love our neighbor as ourself. In this family, we respect the dignity of every human being as we strive for justice and peace among all people and cherish the wondrous works of God. That's how our family does things, the Episcopal family of Jesus-followers. And even though the exact *manner* in which we do those things might look different for each one of us, these are the values our family shares.

"You have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." That language of inheritance, of being heirs, carries a lot of weight in the context of our Scriptures. It means we participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and inherit a share in his glory. And it also means that we inherit the covenant God made with Abraham, the covenant God reaffirmed when God appeared in Jacob's dream at Bethel: that God is with us and will keep us wherever we go, and that all the families of the

earth shall be blessed in us. That's our rich inheritance, and also our highest calling: that if we live according to this covenant—this set of promises we make at our baptism, the way our family does things—then we will be a blessing to the world around us. Because we resist evil, evil will not just have its way. Because we proclaim the Good News, the people who need to hear good news will hear it. Because we seek and serve Christ in all persons, so many people will get the love and support they need. Because we strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being, tyranny and injustice and war will not have the final word. Because we are who we are, as the family of God, we will be a blessing to our own families, our community, our nation, and our world.

And so, dear friends, as we welcome Danny into the household of God, and as we renew our baptismal covenant together, I invite you to prayerfully reflect on the promises and commitments we are making together—our promises to care for Danny and his family, for sure, to tend the soil in which his faith will grow, but also our promises to be a blessing to the world around us. “In hope we were saved,” Paul says, so may we embody that hope and the unfailing love of God to the world around us in all that we are and all that we do.

Amen.