

Our Abba in Heaven

Our granddaughter Addison will be a year old on July 3rd. How awesome is that! Right? So, if you ask Addison, "Say Mama", she looks right at you and says, "Dada". Even if our daughter Erin says, "Addison, say Mama." Addison looks right at her and says, "Dada." Apparently, she isn't saying "M" words yet.

I tell you this story because it's Father's Day, and I want to talk with you this morning about how God is a good, good Father. Jesus addressed God as Father, and in the Lord's Prayer, also gave us permission to call God "Our Father", because we too, are sons and daughters, children, of the Heavenly Father.

Actually, Jesus also referred to God as Abba. The word Abba, when translated from Jesus' language, is what we would say in English as "Papa" or "Daddy". So, Abba is what a child like Addison, when she is fully speaking, would call her Father. This means Jesus called God, Papa, or simply Dad.

Of course, as we already addressed in the puppet show, God is not a male father. In fact, Jesus himself reminds us in John 4:24, that God is not male or female, but is actually Spirit, or as we often call God, Holy Spirit. But still, there are many good reasons to speak to God as, "Our Father, who art in heaven."

First, God, the Father is your creator. This means that God made you as we are. In Psalm 139:13, it says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." In our reading from Isaiah 64:8, it says, "You are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are the work of your hand."

So, God, the Father, meant to make you, knit you, shape you, just as you are. You are his creation, his child, and God loves you as you are. Even if you are like me, and sometimes wonder about the

image that stares back at you in the mirror, it is that very image that God intentionally made and birthed into the world.

Second, God, the Father loves you so much, he does not just refer to you as his lump of clay, but rather, his son or daughter, his child. God, the Father loves you so much, he calls you, and he calls all of us willing to believe it, the children of God. The Apostle Paul boldly proclaims in Romans 8:16, that we are children of God.

Then, in First John 3:1, the Apostle John asks you to reflect on just how much God loves you, since he does call you his child. The God of heaven and earth is not too busy or too important today or any day, to look upon you and say, "You are my son", "You are my daughter", "I love you", and "I am pleased with you."

Third, God, Father, takes care of you in hard times. I have grown to love the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, feeling a little scared because of what was about to happen to him. So, he prayed to his Father heaven, and his Father came to him that night, to provide him the comfort, strength, and help he needed.

Similarly, when you are scared, hurt, or you are facing a hard time, God, the Father is listening for your cry for help. God wants to hear your prayer, and the Father has promised to not only to hear it, but also respond to it. God will provide you, his son or daughter, with just the comfort, strength and help you need.

Fourth, God, the Father, is good to you. This story from the Gospel of Matthew is my favorite. Jesus asks what parent would give a child a rock to eat instead of bread. Then, he says "If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him."

Yes, God, the Father, is good to you. Even if you had an abusive father, even if you have a dreaded disease like cancer, even if you

have lost your job, even life has seemed to dump excrement on you, God has been, is, and will be good to you, because he is your Father, your Abba, you are his child, and he loves you.

I will never forget the day my Dad called me in April 1997. Margo, Erin, Michael, our cat, Kirby and I, had just fled from Grand Forks, because the Red River was overtaking the city, as well as our street and home. We fled on a Saturday to live with our good friends, Pastor John and Dee Wollenzien, in Thief River Falls.

We went to worship Sunday morning at John's church, Trinity Lutheran Church, and then went home that afternoon to figure out what to do next. It was late in the day that my Dad finally got ahold of me. He said, "Tom, are you guys OK?" and he burst into tears. I said, "Yes", and then I burst into tears too.

I had rarely heard my Dad cry, so this was a big deal. Of course, his tears were motivated by his love for me, his son, and my family. I have never doubted my Dad's love. He often hugged and kissed us kids and told us that he was proud of us. Yet, these tears were one more opportunity for me to be certain of his love.

If that wasn't enough, my Dad rescued us when we arrived back in Grand Forks. He helped me pump all out the water from our basement. He helped me pumped all the water from this church's lower lever. He installed a new water heater in our basement, and he and my mom helped us remodel the basement again.

What I am trying to say is that my Dad, and yes, I am bragging a little, is a good, good Father. He provided for my growing up years, he supported me constantly with words of encouragement, he helped me whenever I truly needed help, and in one of the hardest moments of my life, that flood, he kind of saved us.

So, I am one of the lucky ones in life, that the father I call Dad, is good to me. Not everyone has had this advantage, and I am sad for you if your Dad was abusive. You might even struggle with the idea of God as a good Father. If this is true, then I am asking you to look at my Dad, as a better model for God as Father.

Because even more than my Dad, God is a good, good Father. In fact, God is your Abba, your Heavenly Abba, your Heavenly Daddy, who made you, loves you as you are, calls you his son or daughter, is ready to help you (not hurt you) in your time of greatest need, and will today and forevermore be good to you.

So, as you face a fourth month of the coronavirus, as you face a fourth week of racial tensions in our nation, as you face whatever other hardships life has brought you, remember who you are. You are a child of God, the Father, who is with you right now, and ready to provide the comfort, strength, and help you need.

On my part, I believe your Heavenly Abba, is calling you right now to say, "Are you Ok?" He is calling you motivated by his love for you. He is calling you because he wants to help you. He wants to be good to you. So, talk to him. Say, Abba, or say Dada, I belong to you, and I really need you and need your help.

God is such a good, good Father, he will come to your rescue. He who shaped you, who calls you son or daughter, loves you very much. Your Abba is as close to you as your breath. Your Abba has come to hold you in his divine presence. Your Abba intends to be good to you, and to save you in every possible way.

Amen.