

Pentecost Trinity
Peace, Seattle
May 27, 2018
Romans 8:12-17

FINDING ABBA

Some years back Chris and I were invited to a surprise birthday party for Chris's girlhood friend. And we made a point of getting to the hosts' home early so we could be in place before she arrived.

As we entered the home of the party hosts, Ron and Cindy, I put out my hand to introduce myself: ERIK KINDEM, I said.

HMMM, Ron replied as he shook my hand, HOW DO YOU SPELL THAT?
K-I-N-D-E-M.

OH, he said, WE HAVE A KINDOM NAME ON MY MOTHER'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY,
BUT IT'S SPELLED K-I-N-D-Q-M.

THAT SO? I said. We've got a D-O-M Kindom in our family tree too—my grandfather INGVALD's twin brother SIGVALD changed the spelling of his name when he emigrated from Norway to America.

This exchange was getting interesting.

WELL, says Ron, THE STORY OF MY GREAT GRANDFATHER, I'VE BEEN TOLD, IS THAT ONE DAY HE TOLD HIS WIFE AND FIVE CHILDREN HE WAS GOING FISHING... AND HE NEVER RETURNED. HE ENDED UP IN AMERICA—IN PORTLAND, AS A MATTER OF FACT—AND STARTED A SECOND FAMILY. MY GRANDFATHER OLAV WAS HIS SON.

Now things were getting real weird, because I recalled a story my Dad once told me about a relative—I couldn't remember who—who'd abandoned his family in Norway and come out to the West Coast of America.

RON, I said, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE IT, BUT I'VE HEARD THAT STORY BEFORE. WHERE IN NORWAY DID YOUR GREAT GRANDFATHER COME FROM?

Ron couldn't remember.

MY GRANDFATHER, I said, CAME FROM VOSS.

VOSS! he said, THAT'S IT!

The more Ron and I dredging up what bits and pieces of family history we knew, the more evidence pointed to the fact that we had to be related. There was too much overlap for this to be a coincidence.

I got out my cell phone to my Dad; Ron got out his phone to call his Mother, Zora, and in a matter of minutes we had confirmed it:

Ron and I were 2nd cousins, our great-grandfathers were one and the same man.

In our second lesson, St. Paul writes:

ALL WHO ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD ARE CHILDREN OF GOD. FOR YOU DID NOT RECEIVE A SPIRIT OF SLAVERY TO FALL BACK INTO FEAR, BUT 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.

Family histories, as many of us know, can turn out to be pretty messy things.

- Things don't always happen in a straight line.
- People don't always make wise decisions.
- Fathers—and for that matter, Mothers, too—don't always behave honorably.
- Promises get broken. People get hurt.
- Fates get entangled as we fall into each other's lives and fall out again.

And in trying to unravel all the why's and how's and what for's we can end up with lots of dead-ends and unanswered questions.

But—GOD KNOWS ALL ABOUT THAT STUFF! Nothing about us, about our past, our family tree, is hidden from God.

In fact, one of the most remarkable things about the Bible is that it doesn't tidy up the bad characters, or beautify what's ugly, but tells the stories of our spiritual ancestors warts and all.

When you start delving into Joseph and Mary's family tree as found in Matthew, it doesn't take long before the complexity of his lineage is revealed with names like Jacob, Judah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, David. There's no such thing as a pure, unadulterated heritage among the people whose stories we come to know in the Scriptures—even for Jesus.

And perhaps that's one reason why God offers us, in the words of Paul, a promise that is grand enough and inclusive enough to overcome all those nagging questions we carry inside us about our worth, about who we are, where we came from, and where our lives are headed.

YOU HAVE BEEN ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY, Paul tells us, AND EVERY TIME YOU CRY "ABBA -- DADDY" THE SPIRIT WITHIN YOU CONFIRMS YOUR TRUE IDENTITY.

Isn't that one of our deepest yearnings? To know WHO WE COME FROM so that we can know WHO WE TRULY ARE?

In his poem, A STORY THAT COULD BE TRUE, William Stafford speaks of that yearning deep within each of us, the longing for legitimacy and identity, longing for our true self to be affirmed. He writes:

If you were exchanged in the cradle and
your real mother died
without ever telling the story
then no one knows your name,
and somewhere in the world
your father is lost and needs you
but you are far away.

He can never find
how true you are, how ready.
When the great wind comes
and the robberies of the rain
you stand in the corner shivering.

The people who go by—
you wonder at their calm.

They miss the whisper that runs
any day in your mind,
"Who are you really, wanderer?"—
and the answer you have to give
no matter how dark and cold
the world around you is:
"Maybe I'm a king."

There is one who indeed, and without fail, knows this child's name. Knows his true identity. And ours.

WHEN WE CRY "ABBA! FATHER!" IT IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD BEARING WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT THAT WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD. We know our Daddy, and our Daddy knows us.

This whole enterprise—this life we find ourselves caught up in is all about relationship, all about being claimed and included and given firm ground, an inviolate place on which to stand.

And on this Sunday, the texts and hymns and liturgy remind us that the Divine Dance we call HOLY TRINITY isn't a closed circle – we're all invited in!

"The stunning truth," writes C. Baxter Kruger, "is that this triune God, in amazing and lavish love, determined to open the circle and share the Trinitarian life with others... Before the creation of the world, the Father, Son and Spirit set their love upon us and planned to bring us to share and know and experience the Trinitarian life itself. Unto this end the cosmos was called into being, and the human race was fashioned, and Adam and Eve were given a place in the coming of Jesus Christ... in and through whom the dream of our adoption would be accomplished."¹

Beloved, there is One indeed who, without fail, knows each child, names each name. And it is this One whom we call ABBA, PAPA, DADDY.

This resurrection life you and I have received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It is an adventurously expectant life! A life in which we can awaken each day greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?"² because God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms through the sacred waters of baptism who and whose we really are.

And Jesus, who entered into our complicated and compromised human story, who shared the lot of human need and death, this Jesus—now risen—is the ultimate sign that blessing and life, not death and loss, are God's intention, for you and for me and for all.

When we come to this Table, HIS Table, we come as children, to be nurtured and fed as only he can feed us—with his very self, his very life.

So come. Taste and see the life he offers so freely, so completely. Come as children of the heavenly Father. Come to the Table of the Lord.

Amen.

¹ C. Baxter Kruger: *(The Shack Revisited)* (New York: FaithWords, 2012), 62. Quoted in Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and your Transformation*. (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House)2016, 67.

² See Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary Language*. (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 1993) p. 375, 376