

**The Festival of the Holy Trinity • June 7, 2009**

*St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA*

*Rev. Braun Campbell*

Romans 8:12-17

“Adopted”

I recently finished reading a book that some of you may already have read or heard tell of, William Young's novel *The Shack*. This book has prompted a number of different reactions, with some Christians expressing dismay over some of the author's choices while others laud his imaginative approach in demonstrating God's love. I'm not here to give you a review of *The Shack*; a recent issue of The Lutheran Witness magazine offered a quite good, even-handed assessment of the novel, which you can find online. The story follows Mack, a man who has drifted away from God in the wake of tragedy in his life. God, however, takes the unusual step of inviting Mack to spend a weekend together at the remote shack where Mack had experienced great heartbreak. There, God reveals Himself to Mack as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in forms that are quite different than what you might expect – and therein lies some of the controversy surrounding the novel. But the most important aspect of the story, something that I think the author does a very good job of depicting, is an appreciation for how **God wants to be in relationship with us**. Our God, who we recognize as “Triune,” Three-in-One and One-in-Three, is a God who comes down to be with His children.

I don't know where you are in your relationship with God, if you see God as a distant figure in your life or as some One with whom you walk on a constant basis. As Lutheran Christians, I think that we usually have an appreciation – if only an intellectual appreciation – for the God we hear of in Isaiah 6 and Psalm 29: God who is holy(!) and mighty(!) and majestic(!), ruling over all creation. At the same time, we confess – if only with our mouth – that the God we know is a loving and forgiving God who wants all people to be saved. But do we think that God's holiness keeps Him distant, keeps us apart from Him so that we cannot really know Him? And on the other hand, do we live in such a way that disregards God's holiness and discounts what it means to be His people? It's a great irony that Lutherans, who should be so well equipped to appreciate the implications of God's love, might feel so disconnected from it! We can know God and His love because He has made Himself known in Jesus.

This weekend, we celebrate the Festival of the Holy Trinity. As part of the longstanding tradition of the Church, we will voice our faith in the words of the Athanasian Creed (that is, “the really long one”). It serves as a reminder of how God has chosen to reveal Himself to us and how He works among us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yes, it is really long, and yes, parts of it can be kind of confusing. But as you read through this confession of faith, give attention to how all three Persons of the Godhead are working together to be in relationship with you – and how ultimately all this is possible through Jesus. In his introduction to the church's liturgy, *Worshipping with the Angels and Archangels*, author Scott Kinnaman writes: “The Athanasian Creed teaches us that true Christian worship can be recognized in two ways. First we worship the God who is triune, that is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second way we recognize Christian worship is that it is centered on Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Our worship is ‘divine’ because it is centered in Christ.” Everything we proclaim in the Athanasian Creed ultimately focuses around the Son of God and his redeeming, adopting work. **Through Jesus, God is at work to adopt you as His own.**

What is adoption? A number of people here at St. John's have experience with adoption, having adopted a child, gaining an adopted brother or sister, or having been adopted themselves. Adoption is special because a parent seeks out a child and then recognizes that child as their own. The adopted child isn't a “second-class” child, inferior to one naturally born; they *are* their parents' own.

**God does this for us.** In our text today from Romans 8, we hear that God gives us the Spirit of adoption, the Holy Spirit, through whom He makes us His own. When God adopts, He *really* does something extraordinary: He gives His children new birth. That's what Jesus is talking about in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3: the Spirit is at work to bring us from death to life, new life in Jesus, new life with the Father. Adopted by God, He invites us children to sit on His "knee" in prayer, calling out, "Abba!" (This is not an appeal to the Swedish pop music group!) Calling God "Abba" conveys the same thing as "Daddy": it's an intimate form of address, the same that Jesus used. Our heavenly Father wants us to know Him in this way.

God isn't looking to just invite us out to a shack for a weekend; He wants to be with us everywhere, everyday. This is the God who is here for you now in *this* place and *this* time: this is the God who we know through the cross, the God who forgives and makes new, the God who adopts. **In that adoption, God the Holy Spirit sanctifies us.** God saves us, but He also walks with us in life. St. Paul reminds us of what this means, encouraging us to put to death the deeds of the body – our sinful nature – by that same Spirit. We are no longer slaves who are bound to do evil, for God's adopting love has set us free and given us new life. As we gather together in God's house for worship, we experience His presence among us. As we spend time in devotion and the study of His Word, He is there. Father, Son, and Spirit are at work, spending time with us, His adopted children. And because God is with us, we do not need to fear the world any longer.

As we look ahead to the future here at St. John's, we don't do so with a spirit of fear, but with the Spirit of adoptions as children of our Lord. We are about to embark on a new chapter of our life together as God's people in about a month's time, when we extend a call to the new Spanish Language Mission Developer. We don't yet know exactly what this mission will look like or where it will go; however, we do know that the mission field is waiting. We know that those who do not speak English as their primary language need to hear God's message in language closest to their hearts. Once we call this mission developer, we will not be sending him out on his own; rather, we will work with him to share the good news of this God who adopts. Our triune God is God for them, just as He is God for us.

In the name of our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has adopted you as His own,  
Amen.