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Pentecost VII & Proper 10
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Text: Romans 8:12 – 17
Title: God, Our Father

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In 1636, the master painter, Rembrandt created a masterpiece, The Return of the Prodigal Son. In it the father, is shown embracing his son who has returned to him, the moment when the father acknowledges, claims, receives, blesses . . . yes, loves his son. I begin with that image, because, in our reading from Romans this morning, Paul shows something similar. He has revealed to us Christ, our Deliverer. Now, he focuses on God, our Father. Rescued by Christ from the power of sin, we are brought into the kingdom of God, where we live by the Spirit as children of God. That's the main point Paul wants to communicate to the church at Rome and to us today. In Christ, God claims you as His. God is your Father and you are His children. But what does it mean to be claimed as God's children?

To answer that question, Paul creates a contrast between slaves and sons. He writes, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba, Father!'" Paul turns our attention to a moment of prayer. He asks us to stop and consider what happens when we pray. Our words are suspended in mid-air – "Our Father" – and Paul wants us to hear them. He freezes that moment and asks you to consider what it means to be God's child. If you look closely at Rembrandt's painting, you can see what this looks like. Rembrandt places the son's head on his father's chest. What is strange is that the son looks more like a slave than a son. His head is shaven, like a prisoner. His eyes are closed, exhausted. He brings all of his slavery there before his father. And the father reaches down to claim this slave as his son. The boy is no longer a slave but a son, a child of God.

This is what the apostle Paul is celebrating in our letter from Romans. By nature, our sinful passions consume us and take us far from the kingdom of God. If we live according to the flesh, we will die. Exiled, imprisoned, thrust far from God's kingdom. God, however, has brought us to life in the death of His Son. God, the Father, sent His Son Jesus Christ out of love for His people. In dying, Jesus took upon Himself the exile of our sin. And, in rising to life, Jesus brings us into the kingdom of His Father. Today, in Jesus, we bring our slavery before God. We confess the ways we have been less than God's children. The ways we have been enslaved to the experiences and rule of this world. God, however, comes to us in Jesus. He places His hands upon us and draws us near to His heart in love. Today, you are once again claimed by God to be one of His precious children. As St. Paul writes, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." The Spirit cries out with your spirit, "Abba, Father."

The church has a way of reminding us of this moment. It's hidden away in our hymnals, buried deep within the details of the liturgy, but it is there none-the-less. Think about two moments in life, captured in the liturgy: the moment of baptism and the moment of dying. In the service of baptism and the commendation of the dying, the pastor does one simple thing. He places his hands on the person, whether being baptized or dying, and he asks everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer. Why? Because in this moment God is coming and claiming you as His child. In baptism, as you are brought into the kingdom, you are given the Lord's Prayer. This is your prayer, to speak to God your Father. These are your words. God has given them to you as His child. Because you are in Christ, you can call God your Father and nothing, not even death, can take that away from you.

In a few minutes, we will pray the Lord's Prayer together. This is not just a repetition of a prayer that we say every week without paying attention. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Even

now, God is reaching out and placing His hands upon you, drawing you close, and the Holy Spirit is testifying with our spirit that we are children of God. From baptism to the grave and every moment in between, we cry out “Abba, Father” and rejoice that we are children of God.

When Jesus taught us to pray to God, our Father, He also taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come.” Paul’s words in our text remind us of this petition, as he writes, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” Heirs of God. These words are necessary in our world.

Daily we are bombarded by messages that try to take God’s kingdom from us. Watch any commercial. The images that draw you away from the things of God to the things of this world. Hair care products and cell phones, fine clothing and food, vacation get-aways and luxury cars. The riches of this world are on display. The life you have seems less than the life you could have. With hard work, a bit of luck, a trip to the casino or a shrewd investment, you’ll be able to leave your little life behind and live in the luxury of this world.

Words of God to not covet the things of others, to love your spouse and children, to be content with who and what you are, to rise and labor for the good of others, and to draw near to one another in the household of God – these words, this life, this church that God has given to you seems so outdated. It pales in comparison to the life that is promised in each ad. America becomes the promised land where we can indulge our desires, make something of ourselves, get ahead in this world, and, if we keep a little bit of religion in our back pocket, trust that we will be blessed in the world to come.

Being a child of God, however, means something other than accomplishing the American dream. Consider a moment in the history of Israel in Exodus 33. Moses stood there before God

on the mountain. Israel had sinned against God again, aroused God's anger again, and God had threatened to destroy them. Moses interceded and God listened. But He offers Moses a strange vision of life for the people of Israel. God says that they can have the promised land, all of its riches and blessings. They can have it. All of it. They just will have it without Him. God will not go with them into the Promised Land. Moses, however, knows that without God, they have nothing. What good is it to gain the whole world and lose your soul? So Moses comes before God with nothing to offer. He simply relies on God's mercy and prays, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here." Moses will not have the kingdom without the presence of God.

If you listen to Paul's words, notice how he focuses upon our relationship to God rather than things in this world. We are heirs, he says. Heirs of God. Not just heirs of a kingdom. God Himself has promised to go with us. He has called us together as His people and sent us forth to live in this land. Our lives will look different than those of the people around us. We will bless and not curse. We will be content with the calling into which God has called us. We will rise and labor for the good of others and draw near to one another in the household of God. Such lifestyles will not indulge in all the pleasures that America has to offer; doing everything they can to get ahead. No, we will be content with what God gives us knowing that, His kingdom, His presence is enough.

Our Lord has called us to live as His people in faith. When Jesus spoke to His disciples, He encouraged them to take up their cross and follow Him. Life in this world will not be easy. It will not be filled with the best that this world has to offer. But it will be filled with God's love, and He will be with us. His heavenly Father's work will continue, after He rises and ascends into

heaven, and we have the privilege of being called into God's mission. We are the children of God, at work in our Father's kingdom, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.

Notice how Paul closes this section of the text. He writes, "we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." Paul calls to mind the suffering of Christ. We follow His way in this world, suffering with Christ, knowing that we will be joined to Him in glory at the revelation of God's kingdom. We are heirs with Christ. Children of God.

A lot happened in Rembrandt's life before he painted his depiction of the famous parable of the Prodigal Son. He lost his wife, his wealth, three of his four children, and his reputation. He then lost his last and only surviving son. "In the world, you will have tribulation," our Jesus says in John 16, "but take heart; I have overcome the world." After losing all that our world would say gives life meaning, Rembrandt chose to focus upon the one thing that Jesus gives that this world cannot take away. The Spirit of adoption as a child of God.

God, the Father, claims you as His child. Jesus makes us children of His Heavenly Father. We bring our slavery to sin before God and in Jesus we are forgiven. Our fears are silenced and our future is secure. We are made children of God. Children and heirs. Heirs of a new world and a new kingdom to be revealed when Jesus returns, but more importantly, heirs of God Himself. The apostle Paul paints the picture for you this morning in his letter to the Romans: God the Father claims all of you as His own precious children. He loves you, forgives you, embraces you, and claims you as His people, because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus His Son. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.