

VIII Trinity 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Romans 8.12-17 St. Matthew 7.15-21



Many of us have favorite passages from the Bible. They become our favorites because we personalize them...we see in them messages meant for us.

Perhaps it's Psalm 23...*"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want"*. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who comes looking for us when we get lost, to bring us back home.

Perhaps it's John 3:16...*"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life"*. Jesus is the one perfect sacrifice that made this possible.

One of my favorites is John 16:15...*"The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world."* No matter how tough life gets we can turn to Jesus...he's been through it all and helps us see our way clearly.

This morning's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans has always been one of my all-time favorite Bible lessons. The first half of the lesson, the part about "not living after the flesh", has to do with how Christians are supposed to behave. We want to behave in a way that gives glory and honor to God.

In the second part of the lesson Paul talks about adoption. Paul's message is for me a very personal one. That's because I am an adopted child. My parents gave me a home and cared for and loved me and I loved them. If you are an adopted child...you get what I mean.

Adopted children are supposed to have the same rights as other children in the family. Their parents are supposed to treat them the same as their other children. They are their children.

What Saint Paul is really saying in today's Epistle is ALL Christians are God's adopted children. We are his adopted children because of the unique relationship we have with him through Jesus, his *"only-begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary"* as we say in the Creed. It's through Jesus we become "joint-heirs" with him in God's Kingdom.

Jesus spoke a language called Aramaic and he tells us to call God the Father *Abba...Papa*. Jesus tells us we should love and trust God the Father just like we love and trust our own parents. We have that kind of special relationship with God, so close we get to call him what Jesus calls him...*"Papa"*!

The Gospel lesson is also about how we behave toward others. Jesus tells us to *be on our guard against false prophets who come to us looking like sheep on the outside, but on the inside they are really like wild wolves*. Wild wolves can chew people up. It's Jesus' explicit warning not to be deceived by those who call God...*"Papa"*...who claim to be doing his work...but are really hypocrites...interested in what's best for them...even if they hurt others in the process. The "fruit" of their works will eventually give them away.

If we say one thing but act differently...if we are mean and disrespectful toward others... we are not acting like God's adopted children. We may not always agree with other people but that never gives us the right to act badly toward them. We can judge another person's actions...we may not be judgmental. The best way for us to show we are Christians is to do exactly what Jesus tells us to do: *"Love God above everything else and love others in the same way we want to be loved"*.

We want to use our different gifts to give glory and honor to God...our *"Abba"*...our *"Papa"*. We want to use our gifts in the right way, so that no one can say we are phony. If we always act for the good of others, God will bless the work we do. That's what Jesus means by *"bringing forth good fruit"*.

The "fruit" is the result of the work we do, and the work we do is for the honor and glory of God our Father, and to bring others to him. Like a tree that gives us healthy and good fruit, we want to always ask God to help us act like his children, and always do the right thing.

It's often said...*"actions speak louder than words"*. Jesus would agree. Let's make today's lessons two of our favorites. We are God's adopted children. We want to be known by our actions...and the good works that result from them.

