

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Living the Adopted Life

This past Wednesday I sat on the couch in the kitchen looking out through the sliding glass door watching as Dana and William came in from outside. The sliding screen door needed to be moved and that got Williams unmerited attention. He was holding onto it while Dana went to slide it open and all of a sudden he gets this look of "Hey, wait a minute" fascination. To him doors swing open and closed. They don't slide back and forth. So, he had to stand there a minute in intense concentration wondering how this could be all the while sliding the door back and forth as much as the little bit that he could. William's little moment of realization reminded me of my discovery back in 2001 in my first year of doctoral studies that God is Trinity, the loving communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; a loving communion of persons relating to one another in a dance of mutual self-giving. One God in Three persons. And this Triune God of grace has gone through death and Hell to include us in the dance.

I like many of you had had ingrained in me an almost instinctual way of conceptualizing God that was unitarian, meaning simply an individual. In the Bible-belt down south where I'm from this unitarian God was so often portrayed as God the Creator who is holy and will not tolerate sin, the God who will judge us each when we die and will send us to hell if we didn't get ourselves right with him by accepting Jesus, his son who died for me, as my personal savior and then try to live obediently. This Creator/Judge image of God is why the church is having such a rough go of it in Europe and North America. Somehow people outside the church have seen the lie in it, but unfortunately it continues to perpetuate itself within the church because it subverts faith in God with fear of God and that fear can be easily used to control people who are weak and hurting. On the upside, God is our Creator and when we die God will hold us accountable for the lives that we have lived. This is true. But the Gospel, the Good News of our salvation is not that we have been saved from going to Hell when we die. More on this in a minute. Let me explain the other form of unitarian faith that plagues the church.

The more I studied the Bible the more that Creator/Judge God didn't sit with me, so in seminary I more or less accepted the Liberal version of the unitarian faith by saying that God is love. That was a pretty easy sell because it comes straight from 1 John 4:8, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." The Liberal gospel was fairly simple too. God loves and accepts us as we are and knowing that we are loved and accepted the way we are imbues us with the responsibility of loving ourselves, others, and the whole

creation accordingly. The problem with Christian Liberalism and its unitarianism is that it turns the God who is love into the principle of love by which we conduct our lives and we are left on our own trying to figure out what is the loving thing to do in whatever situation we find ourselves. Liberalism's problem begins in that it poo-poo's any idea of Jesus' death being for us. He just came and lived as faithfully as he could according to the principle of love and it cost him his life and thus they say his death was not for us on account of our sin. Whereas the Creator/Judge folks are hyper-obsessed with sin, Liberalism will not acknowledge human sin at all. They believe that humans are essentially good, but because of bad social environments and improper nurturing we make bad decisions that result in hurting ourselves and others. All that can be brought to an end if we just love one another. But, having dismissed Jesus' death as an accident, Liberalism has no definition of what love really is.

Both of these forms of Christian unitarianism fail because they misrepresent the Christian faith to be about individual accountability before an individual of a God rather than a community of persons living together accountable to God and one another to love one another as God loved us in Jesus who died for us. Furthermore, this human community of persons is only able to do this because the divine communion of persons has adopted us into their family, made us one with them so to speak by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Let me push this a bit further. Salvation in the Christian faith is not being saved from going to hell when you die because you have decided to believe certain things about Jesus Christ and spent your life since making that decision striving to be obedient. Salvation is to be saved from the sin and death by which we are all perishing because God has taken this sin and death into his very self in, through, and as Jesus Christ and set in motion their ultimate destruction. God so loved his creation, and so dearly loved humanity whom he created to be the part of the creation which loves the way God loves (that is what it is to be made in the image of God) that God God's very self intervened and became as we are to heal us and indeed the entire creation of sin and death. In this act of intervention God revealed God's very self to be Trinity, the loving communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Salvation sounds like this: God the Father by his overflowing loving will sent the Son to become sinful humanity as we are and betrayed him over to death though he never acted according to the sin that was in him. The Son in his love for the Father did not his own will but the will of the Father and gave himself over to death so that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God the Son become human, sin and death are dead and are dying and by the power of the love they share who is God the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son are recreating humanity by giving their own relationship to humanity in the fellowship which they create within human communities.

If you're still awake after that bit of theologizing let me come at this another way. It has been my great privilege to have been "adopted" into families in the absence of my own. I was born the youngest child of four into what would have been a normal family of the late 1960's. I don't remember much of the first six years of my life, but I do have memories of what it felt like to be family. Somewhere, along the way my parent's marriage become irreparably broken and

I lost my family. Though we occupied the same dwelling the sense of togetherness and functional communication weren't there. We all went our own ways into deeper forms of dysfunction. Fortunately, the family of my best friend was quite open to me. It was in Ronnie's family that I found the unconditional acceptance of me that I craved from my own family. His mother used to affectionately introduce me as her adopted son. Ronnie's father was an alcoholic who made life difficult for them, quite embarrassing at times. His family wasn't perfect either. Nevertheless, there I found family.

When I think of what salvation is it is like being adopted into my best friend's family after the breaking apart of my own. The love that was shown to me by Ronnie and his family and particularly his mother is like what God has done for his creation and particularly us his adopted children in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by welcoming us into the love that is in the midst of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One thing that I can honestly say is that no matter where I have gone God has always provided me with an adoptive family. People who have loved me as family should. Being the adopted family of God is what the Church is all about. This giving a healing home to the broken no matter the cost to us is the best analogy for salvation as it is described in the Bible that I can think of. We have been adopted into the Family of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is healing the family that we came out of by giving us an adoptive family that loves as he loves, until the day when he finally heals it all. Amen.