

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY (In Unison) O God, our Maker and Redeemer, You wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever be alive in Him who made Himself to be like us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Isaiah 63:7-9 page
(The prophet tells of the steadfast love of the Lord who has become His people's Savior.)

7 I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. 8 He said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me"; and so he became their Savior. 9 In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

THE EPISTLE LESSON Galatians 4:4-7 page
(God reveals Himself not by our clock but in the fullness of time---when the moment is right.)

4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. 6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23
(The flight into Egypt saves Jesus but Herod's shows his anger in violence against the innocent.)

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son. . ."

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

THE SERMON 'A Christmas Adoption?' Galatians 4:4-7

INTRO - Twice when we were in Israel I heard a name. Once I heard this name at the Western Wall, the wailing wall, in the middle of a big crowd of Jewish people celebrating Bar Mitvah's. But . . . once in a park, with a child near a swing, I saw a child run after their father saying the word, calling the name. 'Abba!. Abba! Abba! The child held out its arms as it ran, and Dad turned and took the child.

I. The Word 'Abba' means, not Father, not just dad, but 'Daddy.' Listen where this name fits in to our lesson for today.

A. In our lesson for today, our epistles lesson, we are told of God's action at Christmas, and it's intended result in our lives.

1. First, Galatians 4 is a Christmas reading.

A. You can figure it out if you listen to verse 4 **4 But when the time had fully come, God SENT HIS SON, BORN OF A WOMAN, born under law,**

B. This verse talks of God sending His Son, Jesus, and of the birth of His Son.

C. No wonder people see this as a Christmas gift.

2. And, as we read, we hear two results God intends. God's first is eternal. He wants to redeem or save us.

a. Verse 4 AND 5 say, **4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 TO REDEEM those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.**

B. God sent Jesus, the creator of the law, to live under to law to save those who could not keep the law, and needed saving.

1. In other words, Jesus was born, not so we could look at a cute baby.

2. God sent Jesus because we are sinners, helpless to keep God's law, so this baby lived, loving God and loving others. This baby lived keeping God's law.

3. This baby was born in order to grow up and die to pay for the sins of those who broke God's law. He was born to die for you and for me.

4. This baby died so we don't have to go to hell, but we can go to heaven, because Jesus, not only died but rose again.

C. These are the eternal results of God's Son being born.

3. But, the earthly consequences are that when God sent Jesus, and when He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we believe in Jesus as our Savior, we no longer see God as a judging punisher of sinners. Because of Jesus birth, death and resurrection, because of our faith in God worked by the Spirit, we now see God as a loving Father.

1. Listen **4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those**

under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. 6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, THE SPIRIT WHO CALLS OUT, "ABBA, FATHER." 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

2. God sent Jesus so in this world, we have a heavenly Father.

B. Do you see what God wants, he sent Jesus, so when we live in faith, we see him as a beloved father, as our Abba, our Daddy.

1. The verse says that our hearts cry out to Him, 'Abba, Father' We call Him 'Daddy.'

2. Martin Luther explains the beginning of the Lord's prayer in this way. Let me read to you from the Catechism. *Our Father, who art in heaven. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence, we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.*

3. Think about this when we pray the Lord's prayer today - our Dear Father - Abba.

II. In March of 1977 my wife and I took a trip from St. Louis where I was in Seminary to visit with a church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. We stopped outside Nashville at a Denny's, and as we were leaving a boy said to his mom and dad, but mainly his dad. 'I want to be a hopper, Daddy. I want to be a hopper.' So mom and dad took him by the hand and swung him back and forth as they walked along. He was a hopper. But, more importantly, His dad was walking beside him, his dad was taking care of him, his dad was watching over him. Many times with our kids we played the 'Hopper' Game.

A. Sometimes we forget we have a 'Father in heaven,' an 'Abba', a 'Daddy.'

1. What happens when we get a speeding ticket? When we get fired from a job? We feel horrible.

2. What happens when our family has troubles? Our health fails? We have a fight with a friend? We feel lost.

3. As adults, we are used to dealing with our own troubles. We try to deal with these alone, and can forget our Father, our Abba.

4. As a person who knows Scripture we often know we cause our own troubles with our own sin. We are afraid to go to God, and because of our sin, sometimes not sure he'll listen to us.

B. I heard a grown woman, in the middle of a time of stress, say a couple of years ago, I just want to crawl up in my mother's lap and let her hold me.

1. What she was implying was that she wanted her mom to take care of her, but she was an adult, too big, and that wouldn't work.

2. Many times when troubles in life come along we feel the same about our heavenly Father. We're big enough to deal with our own problems. We may have even caused them ourselves.

3. These feelings of being alone, and troubled, and lost, are just the opposite of what God is saying he wants for us in today's lesson.

4. Instead of calling out to our Dad, we try to deal with them ourselves,

because of guilt, or forgetting him, or thinking we are on our own.

III. As pastor I can tell you, just talking about my previous churches, I have known children who have put their parents through, through 'proverbial hell.' Sometimes a parents' heart grieves, and may even expect the worst. But, even though the child may leave the parent, I don't think I've ever seen a parent stop loving a child.

Now, imagine, if you will, a child who leaves home and their parents in anger, leaves in hatred even. The child might even go to legal measures to disown parents. But, imagine, too, that child getting in trouble, and the parent returning and taking on the financial responsibilities of that child's trouble. Imagine the parent adopting the child for whom they were already parent. What undeserved love.

A. That is what God has done for us, for you and me.

1. He created us in love, but we rebelled, and turned away from God.
2. We have wanted to be our own people, and make our own decisions. 'No one can tell me what to do.' Have you ever said that?
3. It gets us in trouble too.

B. So, after we left Him, God found another way to make us His children, He adopted us.

1. God the Father sent His only natural - begotten - son, Jesus to die for our sins.
2. God has paid the price, and called His children to His loving arms.
3. When we are hurting, God, our Dad, our Abba, is there.
4. When we have sinned, God, our Dad, our Abba, forgives.
5. When we feel unloved, God, our Dad, our Abba, loves us eternally.

C. When your in trouble, hurting, lost, lonely, God is there to love you, as your Father, your Abba, your Daddy, wanting you to run to him, calling His name.

CONCLUSION - Are you hurting? Do you have troubles? Have you failed yourself? God? But, Do you know, the Bible says GOD calls you by name. He does that in baptism, in the call to faith? He calls you right now through Worship, through His Word and Sacrament. How about you? Do you hear His call? Will you answer? Hold out your arms and run to Him, your Father, Your Dad, your Abba, . He loves you.

A Story about Loving parents: (I got a story from a member of my former church in Florida.)

'We all know what it's like to get that phone call in the middle of the night. This night was no different. Jerking up to the ringing summons, I focused on the red, illuminated numbers of my clock. Midnight. Panicky thoughts filled my sleep-dazed mind as I grabbed the receiver.

"Hello?" My heart pounded, I gripped the phone tighter and eyed my husband, who was now turning to face my side of the bed. "Mama?" The voice answered. I could hardly hear the whisper over the static. But my thoughts immediately went to my daughter. When the desperate sound of a young crying voice became clear on the line. I grabbed for my husband and squeezed his wrist.

"Mama, I know it's late. But don't...please don't say anything until I finish. And before you ask, yes, I've been drinking. I nearly ran off the road a few miles back and..." I drew in a sharp, shallow breath, released my husband's arm and pressed my hand against my forehead. Sleep still fogged my mind, and I attempted to fight back the panic. Something wasn't right. "I got so scared. All I could think of was how it would hurt you if a policeman came to your door and said I'd been killed. I want...to come home. I know running away was wrong. I know you've been worried sick. I should have called you days ago but I was afraid....afraid...."

Sobs of deep-felt emotion flowed from the receiver and poured into my heart. Immediately I pictured my daughter's face in my mind, and my fogged senses seemed to clear, "I think ---"

"No! Please let me finish! Please!" She pleaded, not so much in anger, but in desperation. I paused and tried to think what to say. Before I could go on, she continued. "I'm pregnant, Mama. I know I shouldn't be drinking now, especially now, but I'm scared, Mama. So scared!"

The voice broke again, and I bit into my lip, feeling my own eyes fill with moisture. I looked up at my husband, who sat silently mouthing, "Who is it?"

I shook my head and when I didn't answer, he jumped up and left the room, returning seconds later with a portable phone held to his ear. She must have heard the click in the line because she asked, "Are you still there? Please don't hang up on me! I need you. I feel so alone."

I clutched the phone and stared at my husband, seeking guidance. "I'm here, I wouldn't hang up, " I said. "I should have told you, Mama. I know I should have told you. But, when we talk, you just keep telling me what I should do. You read all those pamphlets on how to talk about sex and all, but all you ever do is talk. You don't ever listen to me, Mama. You never let me tell you how I feel. It is as if my feelings aren't important. Because you're my mother you think you have all the answers. But sometimes I don't need answers. I just want someone to listen." I swallowed the lump in my throat and stared at the how-to-talk-to- your-kids pamphlets scattered on my night stand. "I'm listening," I whispered. "You know, back there on the road after I got the car under control, I started thinking about the baby and taking care of it. Then I saw this phone booth and it was as if I could hear you preaching to me about how -- people shouldn't drink and drive. So I called a taxi. I want to come home."

"That's good honey," I said, relief filling my chest. My husband came closer, sat

down beside me and laced his fingers through mine. "But you know, I think I can drive now." "No!" I snapped. My muscles stiffened and I tightened the clasp on my husband's hand. "Please, wait for the taxi. Don't hang up on me until the taxi gets there." "I just want to come home, Mama."

"I know. But do this for your mama. Wait for the taxi, please." I listened to the silence, fearing. When I didn't hear her answer, I bit into my lip and closed my eyes. Somehow I had to stop her from driving.

"There's the taxi, now." Only when I heard someone in the background asking about a Yellow Cab did I feel my tension easing. "I'm coming home, Mama." There was a click, and the phone went silent.

Moving from the bed with tears forming in my eyes, I walked out into the hall and went to stand in my 9 year old daughter's room. My husband came from behind, wrapped his arms around me and rested his chin on the top of my head. I wiped the tears from my cheeks. "We have to learn to listen," I said to him. He studied me for a second, then asked, "Do you think she'll ever know she dialed the wrong number?"

I looked at our sleeping daughter, then back at him. "Maybe it wasn't such a wrong number."

"Mom, Dad, what are you doing?" The muffled voice came from under the covers. I walked over to my daughter, who now sat up staring into the darkness. "We're practicing," I answered. "Practicing what?" she mumbled and laid back on the mattress, but her eyes already closed in slumber. "Listening," I whispered.