

“The Shape of Hope”
Romans 8:12-25

Some of the greatest Christian hymns are songs of hope: “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less,” “Rock of Ages,” “Oh God, Our Help in Ages Past,” and many more. Christians are a people of hope. But, we don’t hope is just anything. We hope in a specific “something”.

In our lesson today, Paul switches his attention from freedom from sin (verses 1-11) to hope. He helps us remember what it is that’s at the center of our hope: that as Christians we have a hope that can withstand persecutions, natural disasters, personal tragedies, and economic downturns, a score of gloomy days, and even a pandemic.

And the foundation of all of our hope is firmly established in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are, first of all, adopted.

Paul first writes that we have received the spirit of adoption. That we can legitimately identify ourselves as Children of God—members of God’s family.

At our baptism, we celebrate and declare that we have been adopted by our Lord. In a similar manner to Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit descends upon us and God declares, “This is my son (or daughter) in whom I am well pleased.

We don’t know why the Lord picks us. It certainly isn’t because our individual qualities and characteristics set us apart from everyone else. We’re all sinners in need of a savior. We’re all broken people in need of healing. We can only say that God wills to adopt us as his own.

Paul tells his readers to celebrate the truth that they’ve been adopted into God’s family and to allow that truth to be the seed of their hope. How do we do that? Some folks do this with a prayer of thanks at the beginning of their day. Others make the sign of the cross on themselves to remind themselves that they’ve been baptized and that they live in hope.

Still others, during times of corporate worship, are reminded of their adoption as they recite the Lord’s Prayer, Apostles’ Creed, or receive Holy Communion. Through all those ways we celebrate the truth that we are God’s children.

Paul goes on to write that our adoption as children of God makes available to us a **close relationship with God**, allowing us to cry, “Abba, Father.” Which may seem inane to us, but “Abba Father” is a shocking statement. No other faith tradition addresses their “God” with such a term of familiarity—Daddy, or Pops.

The truth of Paul’s statement is mind boggling. The creator of the universe, and the God of our salvation, allows us to address him as Dad. This personal, intimate relationship is something that’s celebrated over and over again in the scriptures.

- In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his followers that our Father knows the number of hairs on our heads.
- Psalm 136 celebrates the fact that God knew all about us when we were still in our mother’s womb, and that God knows our thoughts before we even think them.
- Throughout his writings Paul declares that Christians have a unique relationship with God. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. God’s Spirit speaks to our spirit. And in Romans Paul assures his readers that absolutely nothing can separate us from the singular love and unique relationship that we have with God in Christ Jesus.

Our hope becomes more secure because of the relationship that we have with God, our Father. We are more than a speck of dust in the vast universe. We are more than simply a number. We are family; and God cares for us. We live in the reality that God holds us in the palm of his hand and knows our going out and our coming in.

Lastly, as those adopted by God and in relationship with God, **we know the future.**

The context of our lesson this morning is this: Paul is writing to a people in the midst of persecution. People were dying for their faith. To these people, he writes, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."

Paul's words written then still speak to people today who have lost homes, belongings and even loved ones due to wildfires, floods, tornadoes, tsunamis, earthquakes and Covid. Paul writes these words to those struggling to find jobs, make ends meet, raise a family, and live lives that honor God and bear witness to God's love and grace.

We look around us and know that things aren't as they should be. We read scripture and read that even creation groans and waits to be released from the curse of sins.

We know that there will come a time when the suffering and struggle will end, when there will be an end to bigotry, racism, prejudice, or injustice, where peace and justice will prevail.

This is the hope of Christianity promised in scripture. It's a hope that doesn't insulate us or numb us to the pain around us. Rather, it's a hope that gives us a broader perspective to see that the difficult times we are presently experiencing are not the sum of our existence.

That Eternal life is bigger—greater—than the now. That our successes and failures, triumphs and struggles are not the totality of life. That there's more—much more in store for us - and these are times that can't even be compared to the wonders that loom ahead.

One of the characteristics that set Christians apart is that we are a people of hope. A hope that empowers and transforms our lives. A hope that allows us to feel peace and contentment in our lives because of Christ in our heart. A hope that shines in the darkness, and shatters the blackness of despair and fear.

This hope is ours, and we're invited to live in this hope today. For we are people who walk in freedom and live in hope. Amen.