

CHILD OF GOD

Romans 8:12-17
Isaiah 6:1-8

Faith Community
June 7, 2009

Introduction

There is a God. God loves you. You are a child of God. How many times have you heard those statements? But how do we know if they're true?

I

You are one of God's children. If we grew up in the church we may have heard that many times. Hopefully people said it to us all the time. Many children sang that great song, "Jesus Loves Me This I Know." The kids who are in Logos hear that they are children of God on a regular basis because one of the central elements of that program is that all of us, adults and kids, are children of God. And the primary rule of the Logos program is that we treat each other as a child of God. You don't make fun of someone else; you don't harm another person; we respect each other, all because we are children of God.

As we get to be adults, we might begin to wonder how we really know that we are children of God. We hear it as kids, but how do we know it for ourselves?

Paul tells us that we know we are children of God because the Spirit of God touches our spirits to let us know. "It is...that very Spirit bearing witness to our spirit that we are children of God." God's spirit lets us know.

Just a few weeks ago during Youth Sunday we had an opportunity to hear of the ways in which God's spirit reaches out to us. We see hints of God's Spirit all around us – a girl helping an injured bird to the side of the road, someone experiencing death and birth in the same afternoon, feeling the support of God's hand in a time of struggle, singing together the Word and the words of God. God's Spirit is reaching out to us all the time.

The young girl helping the injured bird to the side of the road reminds us of Jesus' words "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight...you are of more value than many sparrows." You are a child of God.

God's Spirit speaks to our spirits to let us know how valuable we are in God's eyes.

II

Not everyone senses the Spirit of God. All of us at one time or another have difficulty feeling God in our lives. Things get in the way of our sensing God. Sometimes we are too busy, or our world is too loud to hear the still, small voice of God. For some reason, everybody experiences a time when God seems to be silent. Part of the witness of the biblical faith is that there will be times when God seems to be absent.

The Psalms show us that people have been experiencing God's silence for a long time. Several of the Psalms are very powerful in crying out about the absence of God. When we feel that absence today, we realize that it is not a new experience with us.

Atheists say that there is no spirit to speak to us. Since there is no God, there can't be any Spirit of God. So they explain those hints from God in other ways: we do kindness because it makes us feel better about ourselves. God isn't involved in events that happen; they are just accidents or coincidences. (C. S. Lewis used to say that he found when he prayed that coincidences happened more frequently!).

For those who don't believe, there are other ways to explain these whisperings of God's Spirit. God doesn't force anyone.

III

I believe that God reaches out to every human being. Some hear, some explain it in another way, some are too busy or too wrapped up in the events of their lives to hear the gentle sounds of God. Some just have a difficult time hearing for whatever reason. But God reaches out to us all.

I have been impressed by the number of people, who have moved from atheism to faith. There are several books by individuals who have made the leap from no faith (and no need for faith) to devout faith. These include:

- The outstanding scientist, Frances Collins,
- The poet and writer, Mary Karr, and
- The Hollywood screenwriter, Joe Eszterhas (who wrote the screenplay for the movie, *Basic Instinct*)

I recently picked up a book titled, There Is No/A God. The subtitle is "How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind." It is written by Antony Flew, a philosopher and professor who has taught at Oxford and the University of Aberdeen. In 1950 he wrote an essay titled, "Theology and Falsification." This became the atheist manifesto against belief in God. He went on to publish more than 30 books, many of which were rational explanations for why there is no God and why atheism is the only reasonable alternative. Now he has written this book about why he was wrong and how he came to believe in the creator God.

It seems like the most unlikely people are sensing God in their lives, and they are willing to talk about it even though they may be ridiculed for it. People from all walks of life – deeply intellectual, highly sensual, and profoundly literate – are feeling the Spirit of God. God's spirit connects with our spirits to witness that we are children of God.

IV

But believing isn't enough. As our church's mission statement says, "Hearing God's word isn't enough. God's word demands commitment." To believe in God is not necessarily a great step of faith. If you believe but it doesn't affect your life, then that belief is only a concept in your mind. To trust, to have faith, means that you change the way you live so that it's in line with what you believe. Faith means that we live our beliefs.

An interesting change is happening in Central and South America. This area, which has been almost totally Roman Catholic, is now seeing a huge surge of interest in protestant and especially

Pentecostal faith. Those who have studied these changes say that it has to do with people wanting to express their faith in more than ritual and tradition.

Often people had the icons of the Catholic Church at home and they prayed the rosary, but it didn't affect their day to day living. Now people want to live faith that makes profound changes in their daily lives. They want to feel their faith, sense the active Spirit of God, and offer emotional expressions of faith. They want a faith that is more than ceremony and ritual and one which will affect the difficult decisions of everyday living.

I was impressed by what one commentator said about our Old Testament passage in Isaiah. She wrote, "There is no way to know God without being changed. That kind of transformation almost always leads to service, to work and witness in God's name. This requires that Christians practice a discipline of prayerful discernment, of listening for God's call in their lives. This is not just an individual endeavor but also the corporate practice of a worshiping community."

V

One of the tough decisions of faith is to discern what God calling you to do. Each person and group and congregation that God calls has something they are called to do. Obviously ministry is not just preaching and leading worship, there are thousands of ways in which we serve God. For some it is teaching – helping children (or adults) know about God's love. For some it is caring for the hungry or poor or abused. For some it is playing an instrument. For others it means offering support to the cancer patient, the depressed person, the person with AIDS, or the alcoholic trying to dry out. For each ability we are given there is a way we can use it to serve God.

Conclusion

In 740 BC (the year that King Uzziah died), Isaiah had a weird vision in which he realized that he had sinned and that he lived in a sinful culture. In that vision God forgave him and made him clean. Then Isaiah heard God say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" He hesitated, and then with cauterized lips he said, "Here am I; send me."

What is your calling? What gifts has God given you that you can use to serve God? What is God whispering that He wants you to do?

Amen