

A Living Faith: The Spirit of Adoption

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Romans 8:11-17
Ephesians 5:1-6

“A Living Faith”

A story is told about Harry Emerson Fosdick, a prominent pastor from the turn of the century into the 1940s. Fosdick was taking a walk in New York’s Central Park when he came upon a young man who recognized him and said to him “I’m jealous of your faith. I’m afraid to ask questions, because I was raised in a faith that provided all the answers and to ask questions was to show unfaithfulness.”

As they talked the two of them walked through the park and came upon a small reflecting pool. Fosdick led the young man over to gaze at his reflection in the pool. He said,

Son, your faith is like this pool: calm, shallow, and bordered — you always know what it’s going to look like and what the boundaries are. But it’s not a “living” faith. It’s not going anywhere. Vital faith is like a stream bubbling up from a deep

well within the earth. As it makes its way it twists and turns, sometimes changes course, is deep and slow in some places and fast and turbulent in others, responding to the geographical reality. It’s joined by the waters of other streams and together they make their way back to their source.

Stagnation, not change, is the most deadly enemy of the faith. Vital faith has always been and will always be dynamic, moving, ebbing and flowing.

(From page 66-67 of “Living The Questions: The Wisdom Of Progressive Christianity” by David M. Felten and Jeff Procter-Murphy, 2012 HarperOne)

Faith involves all of our lives, not just a portion that we call the “spiritual” or “religious” part. It encompasses our daily routines, wrestling to complete a report at work, our vacations, grocery shopping, sitting at home reading a novel on a Saturday afternoon.

It also involves our relationships with our neighbors who mow their lawn blowing grass clippings and leaves into our yard.

It is sometimes messy and unkempt, but none the less, this is

our world and all of it is part of our spiritual life.

Because the spiritual life encompasses all of life, our faith is not always predictable.

Our faith must be more than simply knowing stuff about God, but be integrated into our every day routine.

We must not simply ask questions, but live the questions with which we wrestle. We can't expect to have all the correct answers tied up with a neat bow at the end of each day by 9 pm.

We must be in relationship with our God, not simply believe in God.

We must embody justice, not merely know what is right.

We must be in the game, not simply watching from the sidelines.

Our faith needs to be lived, or it doesn't mean much at all.

Mahatma Gandhi, was the Indian lawyer who led a non-violent protest to help India gain independence from Britain in 1947. Gandhi was born Hindu, but embraced much of what Jesus taught. At one point, someone asked him what the difference was between him and most Christians.

Gandhi responded quietly "Well, I think Jesus meant it when he said 'love your enemies.' He meant it when he said 'If you're rich, beware.' He meant it when he said 'Care for the poor, care for the hungry, care for the lost, care for the outcast.' He meant it as our primary priority."

And Gandhi was committed to live that kind of life. Can we?

Taking our faith seriously and comprehensively — having a living faith — this is what the next season in our church will be about. Each week we will be telling stories about how faith is real in the every day life we experience.

Hopefully, along the way you will be able to identify pieces of your own faith story and begin to share it in a new way.

Today we are talking about the "Spirit of Adoption."

Did you know that this weekend is national pet adoption weekend? This is a weekend when people are encouraged to consider expanding their love to include an animal that doesn't currently have a home.

Advertisements display little puppies with longing looks in their eyes — they would have us believe that the puppy is longing for your

love — longing to curl up on your lap as you scratch their ears and belly — longing to sleep at your feet — longing to call your house their home — longing to belong to your family.

Perhaps those advertisements are not wrong. We might all agree that every little puppy deserves a loving home where they are wanted, cared for, are safe, and can live out their purpose.

Are human beings so different? Don't all people want a loving home where they are wanted, cared for, are safe, and can live out the purpose given them by their Creator?

Listen to a passage from the book of Romans, where it talks just like this about us being adopted into God's family.

READ ROMANS 8:11-17

Paul talks about the spirit of adoption. When we talk about the spirit of something we are talking about its essence beyond that permeates the air around something. It's the foundational undergirding reality that communicates the purpose or meaning of something.

Through this chapter of Romans, Paul is talking about the Spirit of

God, as in the presence and power of God's Spirit. He gets so wrapped up in what God's Spirit is doing that he shifts into writing about the "spirit" of adoption, which of course is like the homeless puppy longing for a home.

The "spirit of adoption" is primarily about the intention of the one adopting.

If you go into an animal shelter with the intention of adopting a dog, all of the power is in your hands. Each puppy can make their plea, look cute, wag their little tails — but you hold all the cards. You can choose whichever puppy you want, or none at all. Sometimes a person might say "This puppy chose me!" when they instantly fell in love. But in reality you are the one who signs the papers so the puppy can go home with you. The puppy can't do that for themselves.

The point that Paul makes is that God chose us and wants us to be part of the family.

I have a friend named Bill, who was my roommate at Hope College. More than nine years ago, Bill met an amazing woman named Caye. I had the distinct pleasure of attending their beautiful wedding in Florida in January of 2011.

Caye had dedicated much of her time to children and youth ministry and looked forward to having her own children.

Everyone who had known Bill, always thought that he would be an amazing dad. They both had a sense that God wanted them to be parents, but there were challenges. The heart-wrenching reality of a series of miscarriages left them both discouraged and emotionally drained. They were about ready to give up, but through lots of tears and lots of prayer they started considering adoption.

As some of you probably know, the process of adoption is not only expensive, but long. Bill and Caye sorted through the mountain of paperwork. This also involved long conversations about the kind of child they were open to adopting. What about race? What about physical or emotional challenges? What about health challenges? So many questions. They also had to give all kinds of details about their personal lives to prove to the adoption agency that they could be good parents.

Bill and Caye sat through the interviews and had home visits with the adoption agency and so much more. After this lengthy process, they finally got the green light, but this only meant that they were

added to a database, which was great, but it also meant they had to wait even longer.

The waiting is the hardest part. In the waiting, they did what people do when they are waiting. They got hopeful, then wondered whether this would happen at all. They questioned what kind of parents they would be, Were they ready? They got a baby's room set up, and waited.

Eventually, but all of a sudden, there was a woman who was pregnant and about to give birth, and all the stars were in alignment and they chose to take home little Tori, a beautiful and amazing little gift.

They are keeping private the situation of Tori's birth parents, but what Tori has now is a place she is wanted that she calls home. She is part of a loving family with parents who care for her and keep her safe. Bill and Caye are also providing a foundation from which Tori can discover the person God has called her to be, and to understand what God has called her to do.

This is God's intention for all of us.

God has chosen you, is offering you a family of love and care where you matter among the rest of us who were also chosen by God.

Together as adopted brothers and sisters, we endeavor to have a living faith where we sharpen each other and help each other to understand who God wants us to be and what God wants us to do — that our lives would be filled to overflowing with joy, and our commitment is affirmed to build a world of justice, kindness, peace, and love.