

The Holy Spirit came down on Jesus when he was baptized in the Jordan River and comes down on each one of us in our baptism, too. A voice from heaven said of Jesus, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” And in every baptism, the Holy Spirit whispers, “You are my son, my daughter, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

That’s what Paul is talking about when he talks about spiritual adoption. Jesus was God’s son by incarnation. We are God’s sons and daughters by adoption. But we are no less a part of God’s family tree because we were grafted in. As any good parent will tell you, adopted children are loved just the same.

The problem is that we often don’t know it. Though the Spirit was called down at our baptism, we don’t feel it. And though she whispers to us, “you are beloved,” we can’t hear it and we have a lot of trouble believing it. That’s our perennial challenge isn’t it? To believe we are beloved. Because we only get baptized once, it’s a

important that we celebrate Pentecost every year. Also, because we are so good at what we might call ghosting ourselves, we need some Holy Ghost-ing at least once a year.

But Pentecost is not only crucial for us. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is vital for everyone and everything around us. The Gospel of John says that God so loved the world—without conditions, without qualifiers—and yet somehow we still manage to exclude ourselves from that love. Now when we don't believe that God really, really loves the whole world—no exceptions—when we think that God makes exceptions, then we are always going to worry that we are one of the exceptions. And when we exclude ourselves from God's love, we tend to exclude a lot of other beloved creatures, as well.

I can't put it any better than in the words from the book of Wisdom, one of the Old Testament apocryphal books that you'll find in Catholic Bibles. It says:

For you love all things that exist,
and detest none of the things that you have made,

for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.
How would anything have endured if you had not willed it?
Or how would anything not called forth by you have been
preserved?

You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love
the living.

For your immortal spirit is in all things. [Wisdom 11:24-12:1]

Perhaps we have a hard time believing that God loves us and
that God's immortal Spirit lives in us because life is so hard for us.
These days one of the reasons life is so hard is because the changes
are coming so fast. I'm talking about life-altering changes that daily
tempt us to trade the spirit of adoption for the spirit of slavery so
that we fall back into fear.

For starters, on the cellular level our bodies are changing. We
are aging. Meanwhile, our families are changing, and that can be
hard, too. The technology we use is constantly upgrading. It's like
having to learn a new language every day. And that means that our
relationships, our institutions, our schools and churches—our whole
society—is in a state of rapidly accelerating change. It's exhausting.

We can't keep up. On top of all that, the climate is changing, and we're afraid we're going to burn up.

So Paul was prophetic when he wrote, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" and those groans are getting louder and louder. Way back in the fifth century, long before anyone knew what a carbon footprint was, St. Chrysostom correctly diagnosed the problem: "...the creation became corruptible. Why and for what reason? Because of you, O man!...The creation suffered badly because of you...." [ACCS Homilies on Romans 14] And from a century earlier, Pelagius sends us this warning: "Creation will no longer serve those who have corrupted the image of God." [ACCS, Commentary on Romans]

But before you trade your spirit of adoption for the spirit of slavery and fall back into fear, hear these words: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...." This is a stunning

and almost unbelievable statement that Paul makes here in Romans 8. *The Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.* Do you know what that means? That means that the Creation is waiting for you and for me.

Now a skeptic will tell me that he doesn't see it, that human beings are the problem, not the solution, that we are definitely not what the world is waiting for. But I will tell her that she doesn't know the God I know. The God I know put the divine image in every created thing, but especially in human beings. We know that because we saw God's perfect image in Jesus of Nazareth. He showed us the Way, he told us the truth, he gave us the Life. And if we would only follow him, we could reclaim that image for ourselves. Then we would recognize and work to restore that image in the Creation as well. The Holy Spirit is the power of God that pours down upon us to make that possible.

Paul says that the Creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of

God. But in order for the Creation to be set free, first, the children of God must be set free. That means you and me. Here in the land of the free and the home of the brave, we are still in slavery. We still live in a me-first country. We are imprisoned by “us/them” thinking. We are chained to our “white is right” history. And with the respect to the Creation, we are shackled by our rape and ruin legacy. So when I say that we need to be set free, I’m not talking about political freedom. I’m talking about our need for a deeply spiritual freedom, one that requires both individual and collective conversion. Enter the Holy Spirit.

Though it might not look like it from our standpoint, through the power of the Holy Spirit, this freedom has been unfolding over eons of time. We and the rest of Creation are evolving ever so slowly into the image of our Creator. God created us in love and in spite of everything, God’s love is growing in us. Despite all the setbacks, we are beginning to get it. We human beings are being forced to reckon with the truth that we live in a world where everything is connected,

everyone belongs, and every creature is beloved. Yes, we have learned all kinds of way to destroy life on earth, but now we are actively seeking the knowledge to save it.

Some don't buy it, because they have lost hope. They see the changes taking place in their lives and in the world and they don't see a way forward, nor do they see a way back. But Paul has a word for them, too. "Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?" Of course, we don't see our way forward. We are people, not prophets. Politicians try to tell us that there is a way back, but there's no going back. For hope is neither something you can see nor something that used to be. Hope is simply a willingness to believe. And "if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Let me tell you a secret. Even though we can't imagine it, God has hope in us. And the Spirit will help us in our weakness. The Spirit that hovered over the waters of chaos at the dawn of Creation and brought forth life, the Spirit that breathed into Adam's nostrils so

that he became a living being, that same Spirit will breathe into each one of us the promise of new and everlasting life. The evidence of that life is everywhere, and the Creation is waiting for us to reveal it.

I see God's Spirit revealed in young evangelicals demanding that we take action to save life on this planet. I see God's Spirit revealed in a new Methodist movement that is being born out of the fires of division and the ashes of exclusion. I see God's Spirit revealed in this church as we take action to be love and to build hope and to bring life into this community. I see God's Spirit as we come together to face change and refuse to fall back into fear.

When we cry, "Abba," it is the Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are beloved children of God and heirs of the promise. Whether you are trying to stop climate change or jumpstart a personal change, believe that you are beloved, because this gives you the glorious freedom that the whole Creation is waiting for. This is the hope in which we will all be saved. Holy Spirit, come on down!