

“Bàba: the Spirit of Adoption”

Text: Romans 8: 12 - 25

Used: Cong. Church of Naugatuck – 7/17/05

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts, be acceptable unto Thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Last Sunday, I spoke to you about the gospel lesson – the Parable of the Sower. And in so doing, I readily admitted that when it comes to issues of gardening or farming my knowledge is quite limited and my practice is usually unsuccessful. When I learned that this week’s gospel lesson was the parable of the wheat and the weeds, I quickly decided that I couldn’t go any further with the agricultural metaphors. So you might imagine how excited I was when I read the lectionary reading for this week from Romans. This text, rich with content, is centered around the metaphor of adoption. Now there is something I know a little something about. So this morning I am taking it as my task to try to sell everyone here on the idea of adoption.

Now before I begin reciting the virtues of adoption, I need to be honest right up front: Adoption is not an easy process. Adoption by its very nature is something that is born out of brokenness. A new family is created through the dissolution of another. And the process of adoption – well, it definitely comes with its ups and downs. For Paige and me, it was being involved in the Korean adoption program only to be told without explanation that they didn’t want us as adoptive parents. Then it was being weeks away from receiving our referral when the entire Chinese adoption process was shut down due to SARS. And it wasn’t just us. Almost every adoptive family I know has some stories of the

demands and challenges of the process. But I can also assure you that through the whole process, no matter how many times you get disappointed or frustrated, you have this hope that keeps pushing you to continue on.

Then there is the waiting. A couple of weeks ago, I was in the church office when Denise received a call from her sister-in-law to tell her that her niece received word that the adoptive son they had so long be waiting for would be arriving from Korea later that week. As is the case with most Korean adoptions, the adoptive child would be brought by a caregiver to an American airport near the parents where they would receive him. Upon hearing this news, it felt like the feelings from two years ago, when we were in the process of adopting Emily just washed over me. In my life, there has been no time more exciting, nor more excruciating, than the time when we were waiting. I can't even explain what it feels like to have received a couple of postage stamp size pictures of your child and still not know exactly when she's going to become a part of your family.

Paul, in Romans, tell us that there is a spiritual process of adoption occurring in our world and strangely enough that process isn't all that different from the process I've just described. Listen again to what Paul has to say: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Our world exists in brokenness. We all recognize that. We hear each day about acts of terrorism and war, neglect and abuse, tragedy and disaster. Our world is

far from what we would hope it would be. And yet there is a hope. Paul says that hope is that one day all of us in this world will recognize that we are all children of God. When all the world recognizes that we are all heirs to the grace of God, then the world will be transformed. Still, we are far from the promise of this picture that Paul offers. For now, we must wait with “eager longing” for our world to embrace the spirit of adoption. Translator J.B. Phillips' explains it this way: "In my opinion, whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us. The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the [children] of God coming into their own."

It is hard to believe that almost two years have passed now since Paige and I adopted Emily. Yes, every one of you who told me “She’s going to change your life” was absolutely correct. She makes us a laugh. She makes us cry. She makes us proud. She makes us frustrated. And she makes us late for a whole bunch of things. Most of all, she fills our lives with love.

I had someone ask me way back when Paige and I first started thinking about adoption if I thought I could love an adopted child as much as I would love a child of “my own”. I quickly answered, “without a doubt”, but to be honest the question itself kind of created a nagging little doubt.

I no longer have any doubt. I know that Emily is fully “my child” and I am fully her daddy. Recently, I’ve become more convinced of that more than ever. Now, I don’t have to try hard these days to remember I’m Emily’s Dad. It’s all I hear at home. “Daddy, pick me up.” “Daddy, get me juice.” “Daddy, I wanta go

outside.” “Daddy, why this or why that?” Being Emily’s Daddy right now pretty much means being her provider – emotionally, physically, and educationally. However, there are those times that she reminds me that I’m more than just Daddy.

Emily’s favorite television viewing for the last couple of months has been the Disney movie, *Mulan*. We must watch at least part of it every day. In the movie, there is a scene when *Mulan* returns to her home and upon greeting her father calls him, “Bàba”. An inquisitive Emily asked me one day, “Daddy, what’s Bàba?” I told her that it is the Chinese word for “Daddy”, thinking nothing more about it. Now, I may be “Daddy” all day long, but most nights when I put her to bed, she’ll look up at me with her big brown eyes and say, “I love you, Bàba”

Paul reminds us that we share this same type of loving intimacy with God. Certainly we all have those days when we need God to be our provider...or our protector...or our calm in the midst of the storm of life. But Paul says there are those moments when nothing else will do other than calling God “Abba” – the Greek word for Daddy. While such an intimate word is likely only saved for special time, nothing else as fully captures the sense that through love we are Gods and God is ours. To Paul, this is what the spirit of all adoption is all about – having each living being accept that we belong to God.

Now I began this morning, by telling you I was going to try to sell you on the idea of adoption. While adopting Emily has been the greatest blessing in my life, this is not the type of adoption I’m trying to convince you to embrace today. There is an even more important type of adoption for us to be talking about. Paul

writes in our scripture: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption" (Rom 8:14-15). The type of adoption we in the church need to be about right now is letting people know that there is hope – and that hope come from remembering that we are all children of God. And each of us can have a roll in fostering that type of adoption.

Tony Campolo tells the story of a friend of his who was a deacon in his church. "This deacon was concerned because his schedule and his talents really didn't allow him to minister to people the way he wanted. Finally, the deacon concluded that there was one thing he could do. He could take the youth group to the local nursing home. Once a month the youth group of this church went to the nursing home and put on a brief worship service for the people who were there. While the youth group was leading the service, the deacon stood quietly in the back of the room. One day, this old man in a wheel chair rolled over to where this deacon was standing, took hold of his hand and held it all during the service. That was repeated the next month and the next month and the next month and the next month and the next month. Then one Sunday afternoon when the youth group arrived, the man wasn't there. The deacon asked the nurse in charge, "What happened to that man?" "Oh," she said, "He's near death. He's just down the hall, the third room. Maybe you should go in and visit him. He's unconscious, though."

The deacon walked down and went into the room. There were tubes, and machines beeping, and all the sights you expect surround someone so near

death. The deacon went over and took hold of the hand of the gentleman in the bed. Not knowing what else to do, he said a prayer. And when he said "Amen," the old fellow squeezed his hand. He was so moved by that squeeze of the hand that he began to weep. He shook a little. He tried to get out of the room and as he was leaving the room, he bumped into this woman who was coming into the room. She said, "He's been waiting for you. He said he did not want to die until Jesus came and held his hand and I tried to tell him that after death he would have a chance to meet Jesus and talk to Jesus and hold Jesus' hand. But he said, 'No. Once a month Jesus comes and holds my hand and I don't want to leave until I have a chance to hold the hand of Jesus once more.'"

There are few things in my life as meaningful as when Emily looks at me and says "I love you, Bàba". Just think how meaningful it could be, how transforming it could be, if we could let everyone know, through the spirit of adoption, that they are loved and that they belong to God. Amen.