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Vigil of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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“Like Father, Like Son”

Text: Romans 8:12-17; John 14:8-21

Parents and their children are sometimes very alike and sometimes very different. You have probably seen a father and son together and thought that the son looked just like his father or had the same mannerisms and speech. Or, perhaps you looked at them and thought: How could that son come from that father? They couldn't be more different! The same holds true for mothers and daughters - sometimes they look and act alike, and sometimes they are polar opposites. And this all changes sometimes too. Children who rebel against their parents early on sometimes turn out just like them in the end.

This shouldn't be a surprise to us. Children learn from their parents and imitate them - for better and for worse. Habits are formed and traditions passed down. Like it or not, our parents form and shape who we are.

The readings we heard tonight spoke of this kind of relationship - both of Jesus, the Son of God, and of us, as sons and daughters of God. We'll start with Jesus first. One day, *Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father.”* And Jesus responds: *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.* But this is much more than learning and imitation, with the Father and Jesus - Jesus says that *He and the Father are one. He is in the Father and the Father is in Him.* Here is the mystery of the Holy Trinity - that the Father and the Son are different persons, yet one God. Jesus has come to show us the Father - to make known to us His love and mercy in His words and in His works, that we may truly know Him. With Jesus, “like father, like son” is true in the fullest sense. Jesus' words are the words of God. Jesus' works are the works of God.

And most especially is this true when Jesus is hung on the cross. There we see the love and mercy of God in full bloom - that the almighty God allows Himself to be weak, that the eternal God dies, that the Creator over all descends to the depths of His creation, in order to save it. That's who God is, and Jesus shows us that truth. Many people think many things of God, but if you really want to see and know God, there He is; that's what He does. How serious is your sin? *That* serious. How great is His love for you? *That* great. How committed is God to you, your salvation, and your life? *That* committed. And so in Jesus, we see and learn that we have not a God who is demanding and mean, an overlord and a tyrant, but a God who loves and serves and wants the best for you.

And what is best for you is for you to be His child; to be adopted into His family. And so as Paul said, *you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba!*

Father!” You received that Spirit in Holy Baptism, where you were born again, born from above; reborn, a son or daughter with a new Father. And, as Paul goes on to say, when you are adopted in this divine family, you receive the full inheritance as heirs of God - all that is His is yours. He holds nothing back. You’re not a half child or a step child - you are His child, 100%. And what a great gift that is.

But that’s not all; that’s not the only gift. Your Father continues to speak to you and teach you; He continues to help you understand what it means to be a part of this family. That as sons and daughters, you begin to look and act, speak and do, as He does. Your new Father shaping and forming who you are.

That, too, is the work of the Spirit - His ongoing work. The Helper, Jesus calls Him. To help you. And this Spirit from the Father will not be seen as Jesus was seen, but will ***dwell with you and be in you*** . That you live no longer ***according to the flesh*** , according to your old spirit and its sinful urges and desires, ***which lead to death*** ; but that you live according to the new Spirit you have been given, with its holy desires, ***which leads to life*** . For the Spirit you have been given is God as well - the third person of the Holy Trinity, *the Lord and Giver of life*, as we confess in the Creed. And the Spirit teaches you and forms you as children of God, that you be sons and daughters of God who look like the Son of God. That it may be true for us as well: *like Father, like sons*.

That’s why Jesus tells His disciples, ***If you love me, you will keep my commandments*** . That’s not so much a command as a statement of reality. With the Spirit, the Helper, children of God live as children of God. Like Father, like son. We speak as He speaks, speaking the truth in love; and we do as He does, living lives of mercy and love.

But there are times, also, when we are those children who are *unlike* their Father and couldn’t be more different than Him - when we sin. When we *do* live according to our old sinful flesh, when we follow *its* urges and desires, when we listen to the words and temptations of the world and satan instead of the Word and truth of our Father in heaven. At those times, people may look at us and wonder: *how could he (or she) be a child of God?* And for those times and actions, we need to repent. To turn back to our Father in sorrow that we have reflected poorly on Him and lived not as who we are.

And the Spirit helps us do that as well. For He is the Helper not only to live a godly life, but to help us repent when we don’t, and then give us the forgiveness Jesus won for us on the cross. ***Jesus has not left us as orphans*** , on our own. He did not ascend into heaven and then say: *Hope to see you there!* No. He gave us His Spirit to be with us always; *to help us*. The Spirit ***by whom we cry “Abba! Father!”*** By whom we know we have a dear Father and a forgiving Saviour. By whom we know who we are - no longer children of the world, but children of God . . . even if we don’t always show it in our words and deeds.

And then as Paul also said, that's going to mean *suffering with Jesus* in this world and life. For even as we are sons and daughters of God, there are also sons and daughters of satan, who live as he lives. And the conflict that has been in this world from the beginning will continue. And we often get caught in the crossfire.

But Paul then adds a promise: *that if we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him*. For the Father will not forsake His children. He who sent His Son to save us and His Spirit to keep us will bring us in the end into His kingdom, and we will be glorified with Jesus and live with Him forever. One grand and glorious family reunion, in His kingdom, which will never end.

So Philip, you have seen the Father, in the face of the Son. And the day is coming when you will too. Until that day, we have been given the Spirit of the Father and the Son, to know our Father, to receive His goodness and love in the Son, and to live like father, like son. We are not orphans. We are children of God. Now and forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.