

COMMUNION MEDITATION

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Galatians 4:1-7

The apostle Paul wrote more books in the Bible than anyone else, thirteen in all, though some are only a page or two. In all those pages of scripture, Paul mentions the earthly life of Jesus only twice. The first time is in I Corinthians 11 when he talks about the Lord's Supper. Those words are always said whenever we celebrate the Sacrament.

The second time occurs in our Bible reading for today. Short though it may be, this is a significant passage because Paul talks about Jesus' birth, his mother Mary (though she remains unnamed), and our adoption as the children of God.

The four gospels are always talking about the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, but Paul mentions that life and ministry only twice. Why is that?

The obvious answer is that we all talk about what we know, and Paul never knew Jesus when he walked on the face of the earth. Paul met Jesus as the Risen Christ. Remember, he was off to Damascus to round up Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for a trial, persecution, and possibly even death, but he is radically and wondrously converted to faith in Christ on that road to Damascus. You can read about this life-transforming moment in Acts 9, 22, and 26.

But what needs to be said here is that Paul never knew Jesus of Nazareth. He meets Christ on the way to Damascus. That's why he talks almost exclusively about Jesus Christ, not Jesus of Nazareth.

But Galatians 4 is the exception, one of only two. Here he writes, *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that they might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!'"* (vs 4 -6)

That's a beautiful passage, and it carries with it some deep theological meaning. First, it should be noted that almost all of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and almost all of the New Testament was written in Greek, but there's a third language that occasionally comes into play. It's called Aramaic.

Aramaic is the language Jesus spoke. Mary used Aramaic to call her young son into dinner. Joseph spoke Aramaic when negotiating a price for his carpentry, and Aramaic was the language spoken in Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion*. Aramaic plays a part in this passage because the word "abba" is Aramaic for "Daddy," a term of endearment a

father likes to hear and a child likes to use. It shows the closeness of a healthy relationship between father and child. "Abba" reveals how close we are to God who reaches out to us in Christ. There's a big difference between calling your father "daddy" and simply saying "father," which at times can almost sound clinical.

But the real point of this brief passage from Galatians is to reveal that we, those who have faith in Jesus as the Christ, have now been adopted by God as his children.

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law *so that we might receive adoption as children.*"

This phrase "the children of God" is commonly misunderstood. I hear politicians, social workers, and TV commentators use this phrase in ways that were never intended by the biblical writers. Not everyone is a "child of God." The New Testament makes it clear that only those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ are his children. To be adopted by God means that you have committed yourself to God.

People say, when seeing a natural disaster, that we should help those who have been dispossessed or lost a loved one or experienced psychological trauma because they are the "children of God," or more commonly, "we are all God's children."

Indeed, we should help them, but not because they are the children of God. We should help them because they are created in the image of God. They are God's creations. If we help them because they are "the children of God," then we would help only Christians, and God would not want that.

The Table before you is spread for the "children of God." You will not find at the Table anything you don't already have. You and I come to the Table by faith, but you don't get faith at the Table. Faith is something you bring to the Table because you have already been adopted by God as his children.

Everyone on the face of the earth is created in the image of God, but not everyone knows that. Once we do, we become God's children and we now know that we can't live without God's nurture and providential care. The Table --- Christ's Table --- is where we are fed, sustained, and nourished. Coming to the Table is a way by which we say that we can't make it on our own and that we don't want to. It's our way of saying that we need God, and it's Christ's way of saying, "I am here. I will always be here," or, as Jesus says in the last book of the Bible, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if those who hear my voice open the door, I will come in to them and eat with them, and they with me." Rev. 3:20