

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 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. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

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; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in 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. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

I don't know about you but it is really hard listening to some of the readings we have from the bible.

First reading...part of the story about Jesus life, we get it, we understand it, at least we have a bit of a chance of understanding it. But the 2nd reading...**what on earth was all that about?** If this is the first time you have come to Church, and it might be, what on earth would you make of it?

Part of the difficulty is that it is so **dense**...each line has **SO much meaning to it** – but the **effect** if you are listening to it, **taken out of context in a chunk** as we do in Church is **mostly to send you to sleep!**

Going to try and **wake you up** but making **you do** some of the **work this morning** and also by trying to pull some **things out of this passage** that hopefully you can **connect with**, find relevant, that can make sense.

Now I know that you have been **looking at passages** from **Romans** for the last few weeks so some of **you will** have **some idea of the context** of this reading...at least I hope so!

But it is always **good to re-cap** and a **good teaching** method is to **check what you know**.

On the back of your OS there are some **multiply choice** questions. So hope you all have a pen...spend a few minutes.

The passage we read this morning was part of:

A sermon

A letter

An email

It was written:

While Jesus was alive.

A few years after Jesus died

100s of years after Jesus died

Paul, who wrote this passage was:

One of Jesus 12 disciples

One of the leaders of the early Church

The first Bishop in the Church.

What was Paul's name original name?

Saul

Raul

Stephen

Where was Paul when he wrote it?

Rome

Corinth

Ephesus

Before Paul became a Christian what did he do?

A Shepherd

A Carpenter

A Pharisee

Who was Paul writing to?

The Jews

The British

The Gentiles (non-Jews)

OK...let's see how you did? So now we have a bit of a context for the letter and a bit of an idea of who Paul was let's **think about this passage** and what it is **trying to say**.

Have a **look at the passage on your OS**, how to begin to get in to what is going on. Begin with a very **basic technique when you are reading some written text**, if you want to have **a sense of what the writer is trying** to tell you see **what they repeat**. There are a number of key phrases and words that are repeated a number of times.

Have a good look. **Going to write the key phrases/words** on the **flip chart** and the number of times they occur.

Children of God

Spirit

Adoption

Creation

Hope

Ok – these are the **key themes**. Just going to **talk a bit about each of them**.

Children of God & adoption...connection between those two.

At the **heart of the Christian faith** is a **belief** in the way that **our relationship with God** has been **changed by Jesus**. That **Jesus** himself **modelled a new and intimate relationship with God**, one where God was close and near to him. And **we are called into that** relationship as **children of God**.

So in the **first passage** – which must have seemed a **weird choice** for this time of year – we have **Jesus talking to God as ‘Abba’**. A word that means **‘Daddy’** in Aramaic

He expresses the close and **intimate relationship** that he has with his Father. What is interesting is that it is at Jesus **absolute lowest point**, when he is **facing his death, betrayal** – when Jesus is in despair – something we rarely think of. It is **at the moment** that he uses this **very intimate word for God...Abba**.

What **Paul** then goes on to tell us in this part of **his letter** today is that **we also can call God ‘Abba’**, we too can have that **intimate relationship with God**, **we too** can say that **we are children of God**. That is a really amazing claim. It maybe that **like Jesus** it is at the **lowest points** that we also **open ourselves** to the reality that intimate closeness to God and **cry ‘Abba’**

Now what about this word **adoption** that is also another **frequently used word**. Why is it a **positive word** in this context? We often will somehow think that if **a child is adopted** they somehow have **a lesser place**, maybe some less loved? Why this use of adoption?

As we **noticed earlier Paul** was **writing to the gentiles...non-Jews**. It is hard for us to remember sometimes that **faith in Jesus** at the **very beginning** was just seen as a **branch of Judaism**. Jesus was the **fulfilment of the Jewish faith** and therefore **clearly he had** come to **save the Jews**, the **rest of us** were **out of the picture**.

Of course there **is much in Jesus life** and ministry that **points to** the way that he was **looking beyond Judaism**, but in the **early Church** it was **Paul...a Jew and Pharisee....**who oddly, you might say, is that **absolute key person** in saying **this is for everyone**.

So **why is this word important?** Because the **Jews were the children of God**...right through the Old Testament that is how they are talked about, so hang on, **how can Paul say that all these non-Jews**, people like **you and me**, are also **God's children**. It's because **we're adopted!** Yes, the **Jewish people are my children**, but **I have adopted you lot too!**

The **language of adoption** here is a way of **Paul expressing the breadth of God's love**, a love that **reaches beyond the people they previously thought were included**.

And **how does that come about?** Here is one of the other words...the **word 'spirit'** that occurs **so frequently** in this passage and **throughout this letter**. I think that is something else **you have been thinking about** over the last few months, **how the spirit, the 3rd person of the trinity, works in our lives**.

The **spirit is part of the wholeness of who God is**, but is **God working in our lives**. A **kid's illustration** that has elements of truth...if I had a **chalk board**, ask you to **draw a picture of Jesus** – that picture is an **image of the historical Jesus** who walked this earth and showed us how to live.

Then **take a duster and rub the picture out**... then **shake the duster and the dust goes everywhere**...Jesus no longer in one place but through the spirit is **with us** everywhere, working in our loves.

So key verse: ***'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God'***. As the **spirit leads us**, as **God works in our lives**, so **we are children of God**. It is **God's spirit in us** that **'bears witness'** (reminds us, prods us) that we are children of God.

It is **really interesting that idea**, that it is the **spirit in us that constantly reminds us 'bears witness'** that we are **God's children**. There is **so much that tells us we are not** – **NO we're just a random selection of cells**, **NO we're mean and**

horrible, bitchy and gossipy, NO way are **we children of God**. But the **spirit, working in us**, bears witness, says **NO – you are a child of God**.

This is where **we can look at another word** you spotted – the word **‘flesh’**. We find that word a **bit weird** and we **straight away** think he must be **talking about sex or nice things!** But if we **understand that word flesh** as **all the things in the world that pull us away from God**, from the **way we are called to live...but that doesn't straight away mean all the things we think of as nice!** They can lead us to God too!

There was a **quote from the Dalai Lama** floating around **on Facebook this week**, those of you who are on it a lot might have noticed it.

The Dalai Lama was asked **what surprised him** about **humanity** and he answered:

‘Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being the he does not live in the present or in the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then he dies having never really lived’

I think that is a really **good picture** of what this word **‘flesh’** means in this passage. An **image of the way** that **our preoccupations with things in this world** (and there are **many more** than simply **money & health**, but those are big ones) can **pull us away** from **the spirit working in us**, calling us **to the way of life that God calls us to**.

Creation & hope are the other two words I just want to say a **couple of things** about.

The **second paragraph** gives a **real picture** of the way that the **world in which we live ‘creation’** is **not as God desires it to be**. **Paul** talks about the **current sufferings**, about the **tension between looking towards a world that is as God**

would wish it (the glory revealed to it) and the **way it is**. This sense of the world of creation, not as we would wish it is one we can so identify with.

The **news this week has been awful**, the images and stories from **Gaza** have been particularly painful, the loss of so **many innocent lives**. Over **200 Palestinians killed** since Israel started it's most recent attacks on Gaza and **many of them children**. And then of course the terrible, **terrible tragedy of flight MH17**. Today we **look at the world** is so **clearly not as God made it to be**.

The suffering that Paul speaks of is so clearly evident in our world today. **Creation groans...the world waiting** to become the **place it was made to be...a pregnant waiting** is the way that Paul describes it. **Much suffering, much grief...but** remember that it was **at Jesus lowest point, facing his own death** that he is recorded using that **wonderful word 'Abba' of God**. At that **lowest point**, at the **point of our suffering**, of our grief, that the **spirit witnesses within us**, reminds us, urges us, speaks to us, that **we are children of God**.

This passage finished today with hope, **hope in the midst of the futility of creation, hope in what we cannot see, hope in the darkness**.

It is hard to speak words of hope into another's grief and suffering without it sounding trite and hollow. And so I am going to finish by **reading an extract from another letter, a very different sort of letter** written **to my mother** over **20 years go by my cousin David** (her nephew) **who died of kidney failure and cancer when he was 38**.

It is a voice that speaks **so profoundly of hope** in the **darkest times**, it was written **a few months before he died**:

'It is right to dread suffering and affliction and sheer inhumanity that so often leads to death. Without that dread we would not fight against those terrible consequences of our own evil, arrogant or thoughtless actions, nor struggle to master the ravages of non-sentient bits of mutating RNA that devastate our lives.

Did God send these trials? He certainly initiated the process, but he doesn't send trials. He doesn't change the process so that David McLeod gets clobbered, to see how he faces up to the challenge. In creation, things are so, and he loves us and all creation. He came to us – and he comes to us, in so many different ways to explain things, to enlighten and guide us. Because he is in all things – even in every atom of every mote of dust – we can receive his wisdom from any part of his creation: from a loved one, from an enemy, from a creature, or a plant; in the shape of a tree or even in the roll of a dice, we may learn something that he is trying to teach us. We will learn to conquer ourselves, to relieve suffering, to destroy viruses; and there will always be new iniquities, more insight, help and inspiration.

I'm nearly done. I have thought and discovered all the a foregoing through having to understand what has happened to me. You may find it utterly egocentric and with no logical thought. But I know this: that I was very afraid in April last year, of what damage cancer was going to do to my most precious sense of taste and gift of articulate speech and friendly mimicry (*David had contracted cancer of the tongue*). Yet I went into theatre, and came to, in a room full of love, care and concern. I understood from this little death, the joy of resurrection, even I, with my two-bit suffering, even I was worthy of his love and care. Then I placed it on a scale of one to ten, and, for an instant, I think I understood the magnitude of Jesus' suffering and infinite dazzling brightness of his joy at the prospect of my salvation. He spoke to me through the words of my ancient namesake, in the thirteenth psalm:

.'.....My enemy will say: "I have overcome him"

and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love;

My heart rejoices in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.'