

You are no orphan! (5/1/22)

Sermon Description: A key belief in the Christian life is that we are adopted as a son or daughter of God. In this, we go from being a spiritual orphan to a dearly loved child. Yet so often we live as though we are not dearly loved, not adopted, not a child of God. Why is that? And when (not if) that happens, how should we respond?

Main Passage: Ephesians 5:1-14

Title: You are no orphan!

Topics: God>Trinity>Father

Tags: orphan, father, child, adopted

Questions to consider:

- Do you see yourself as a dearly loved child of God?

Week #15

Introduction: What do Babe Ruth, Gerald Ford, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Simone Biles have in common?

They were orphaned at a young age.

And though you may not have been orphaned, it doesn't mean you cannot identify with some of the challenges and feelings and thoughts each of them would have experienced.

It's not hard to imagine their loneliness because you've experienced loneliness. A time when you needed someone, hoped to be surrounded and supported...but were not.

And it's not hard to imagine the insecurity they have felt at times in their lives because we've all experienced feelings associated with insecurity. Whether a relationship or work situation or a physical situation, we find ourselves defenseless, precariously exposed.

And it's not hard to identify with their instability because of the instability we've experienced previously. Tossed like waves, whether in our decision-making or our faith. Quite movable. Not nearly the anchor or oak we hoped for.

One more, the loss of identity. Some of you have lost your sense of identity. Maybe because of being orphaned at a young age. But some of you, as adults, have lost parents. Less and less are you referred to as the son or daughter of so and so. Or through a job loss, or divorce, or faith

struggle, or like me you've reached that middle age section of life...there's that question of Who am I? I used to be a baseball coach. I used to be a doctoral student.

Last week:

Ephesians 4:22–24

²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

This week:

Ephesians 5:1–14

¹Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be partners with them. ⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

How we tend to read Scripture: We often make the mistake when reading Scripture of emphasizing the wrong sections. See below.

Ephesians 5:1–3

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Instead, this is how we need to read Scripture:

Ephesians 5:1–3

¹Follow God’s example, therefore, **as dearly loved children** ²and walk in the way of love, **just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** ³But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.

To wisely emphasize that we are “dearly loved children” is to properly understand the most important of this passage. It is NOT that we take note of all of the commands in order to try and do all of the commands. We shouldn’t do that. If we were to try, we’d quickly experience failure. And the previous feelings of insecurity and instability and loneliness will come flooding back.

Instead, we need to pause and go deeper in understanding our identity as dearly loved children, so loved that it says Christ gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

How can we do that? Let’s revisit a well-loved story, the one called The Prodigal Son.

Luke 15:17–32

¹⁷“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. ²⁵“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹“ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always

with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”

There are many items we could note. At the least, let's share these:

- The younger brother hopes, maybe, to become a servant in his return. He is not. He is restored as a son. This does NOT come with expectation for repayment. It is GRACE. A gift. Kindness. It is the overcoming of his orphan-like living and all that comes with it (loneliness, loss of i.d., insecurity, instability). It is a father telling a son, “I love you. Always.”
- The father runs. We may not know how uncommon this was. Maybe your dad loved running so much he ran in half or full marathons. That was not the case then. Fathers were distinguished as displayed through people running for them – whether toward or away. The father did not rush. Others could or would do that. So his love is shown through his not waiting but running to his son.
- The elder brother shows just as much orphan-like thinking as his younger brother. The dad must correct him in his error. The elder brother worked as though his inheritance were based on it rather than his father's loving kindness. The father corrects his son, all he has will be his...and it's more than the elder brother can possibly imagine. There is abundantly more, certainly enough for a party due to his younger brother's return.
- A newer aspect to this parable that I recently learned further unpacked the reality and identity of the elder brother. Early in the bible, when a firstborn is identified, that would be Israel. In this parable then the elder brother, along with all his foibles and follies would be Israel and her religious leaders. Now, a different firstborn is also identified in Scripture. That firstborn is Jesus. Jesus is CONTRASTED from the elder brother in the story. Unlike that elder brother, Jesus holds nothing back. He doesn't sulk when you and I turn back to our family and hometown. Jesus, like the father, shows great love, great sacrifice, great extravagance in welcoming us back and throwing us a party. Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded. As our passage says, Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Praise Jesus!!

Consider Tim Keller's words:

When he gets back in, the elder brother is very angry. Do you know why? Because, you see, since the younger brother has squandered all of the wealth, everything the father is giving to the younger brother (for his return party and beyond) is whose? The elder brother's. See, the elder brother now owns every robe. The elder brother owns every ring. “Every robe is mine,” he says. “Every ring is mine, and every fatted calf is mine. I've worked my fingers to the bone and what thanks do I get?” But Jesus puts the elder brother in there when he's rebuking the Pharisees, and if you look at the context, you'll know what Jesus is actually saying is, “I am the true elder Brother. I am the real elder Brother.” What would a real elder brother have done? The real elder brother would have gone out there and found the younger brother in the pigsty and would have lifted him up and would have brought him home and said, “Little brother, here's my robe. Here's my ring. Here's my fatted calf. It's all at my expense, and I freely give it to you. Enter back into the joy of the father. Let's have a party.” The true elder Brother is Jesus.

Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

So now we return to the rest of the passage as **DEARLY LOVED CHILDREN!**

You are NO orphan!

Ephesians 5:3-7

³But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be partners with them.

I say, "You are NO orphan!" because I think this behavior reflects the orphan, the one who is feeling unstable, uncertain, alone, perhaps a loss of identity. Just like the orphan we will stop at nothing in order to avoid feeling all the feels of insecurity, loneliness, instability.

Sexual immorality tries to bring a security, tries to stop loneliness, tries to grab onto another person for a form of stability, any kind of stability to be a type of anchor. And we reach out for another instead of reaching our for Christ.

The same is true of greed and all the misuses of speech that it speaks of. We feel unstable, insecure, lonely, struggling with our identity...and we turn to money and we ask it to fill us, to help us, to heal us, to anchor us...and it can't. It won't. We will find ourselves homeless like the younger brother or feeling utterly alone in a palace like the older brother.

And we use our words to muster up a stability, a security, an identity, to make sure other people know how brilliant, beautiful, loveable, perfect we are. Our words become our identity. And you've experienced this...you must speak up or speak out. In our culture, your words (or silence) become a marker of who you are!

Don't be partners with them. Partner with Christ. Look to the Father and his perfect firstborn son. They welcome you with open arms. They are the source of stability, security, connection, protection, love and acceptance.

You were once an orphan. You are no longer!

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³But everything exposed by the

light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Consider this quote:

Paul repeats that light is what enables people to see things clearly and to recognize evil for what it is (**5:13–14a**). To drive the point home, he cites what may have been an early hymn associated with Easter or baptism (**5:14b**). The hymn calls those who are asleep in death and darkness to wake up. Christ will raise them from the dead and shine his light upon them. This hymn may have been sung when the Ephesian believers were baptized, and if so Paul is reminding them that at their baptism they turned their back on the world with all its darkness, desires and attractions and embraced Christ who now shines on them.

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In Tokunboh Adeyemo, [*Africa Bible Commentary*](#) (Nairobi, Kenya; Grand Rapids, MI: WordAlive Publishers; Zondervan, 2006), 1462.

Hopefully, by now, you can see the vital importance of having our identity tied to Christ, finding our security and stability in him, having connection and protection from our father and his son, our elder brother, Jesus! We need the Lord.

It is a fool’s errand to seek to provide our own security, stability, connection, and identity apart from Christ. We need him first. Foremost. Now and forever.

Let me share Emylee’s story. She was baptized on Easter Sunday.

Emylee Altenburg

Looking back at my youth, I was quite the cookie cutter, “goody two-shoes” Christian...In school and activities, I was a “try-hard” straight A student, always doing my best to live up to the standards of those around me and those very high ones I set for myself.

During my first year of college at the University of Wisconsin, stepping out of my hometown bubble, I started to question whether God was real. More than that, I wondered if I could find my worth and fulfillment outside of him in more tangible things on earth. So, I continued to focus on achieving perfection in academics and being a well-liked person. I looked to the approval of friends, boyfriends, even strangers, to fill me up, to give me worth.

Ultimately, looking to academic success and approval of others left me empty. I also realized that no matter how hard I tried to be a good person, I always came up short: a broken human with the capability of doing real wreckage on my own. It was then, during college, God opened my mind and heart, and I decided to renew my trust in Christ, my redeemer and solid ground. He sees my brokenness fully and yet has loved me perfectly. He gives me full worth, purpose, identity and has been proven faithful through the glories and sufferings of this life. Psalm 16 is lovely and rings true to me: “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

From an orphan to a child. From trying to achieve her own stability, her own security, her own identity...instead turning to the Lord, again and again again.

Whether a younger brother or an older brother, whether tending to the house or having left the house, whether fulfilling all you thought you should do or abandoning all responsibilities, turn to Christ, your perfect elder brother, let the father run to you. Let our Lord be your anchor, your stability. Let him be the one to surround you and accompany you. Let him be your defense amidst insecurity. And let him and how he sees and what he's done for you **BE THE MOST IMPORTANT REALITY OF YOUR LIFE!** More important than what you did or did not do. More important than what you said or didn't say. More important than your good and bad decisions. More important than what you did last night or this weekend.

God the Father, Christ the Son, and you and me—dearly loved children of the Father, and dearly loved siblings of Jesus Christ.



Ephesians

Ephesians 4:22-24

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Ephesians 5:1-14

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How we need to read Scripture

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*The Return of the
Prodigal Son*

c. 1661–1669

Rembrandt van Rijn

Hermitage Museum

Saint Petersburg

Luke 15:17-32

¹⁷“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

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What would a real elder brother have done? The real elder brother would have gone out there and found the younger brother in the pigsty and would have lifted him up and would have brought him home and said, “Little brother, here’s *my* robe. Here’s *my* ring. Here’s *my* fatted calf. It’s all at my expense, and I freely give it to you. Enter back into the joy of the father. Let’s have a party.” The true elder Brother is Jesus.

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so, how
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work?

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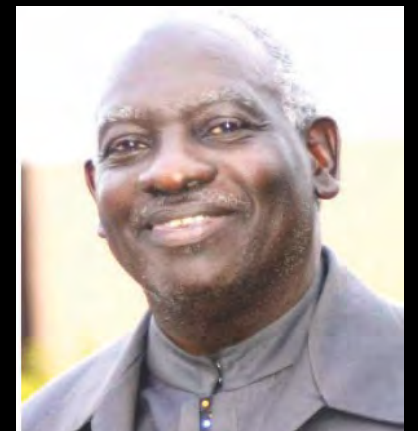
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Yes we're free - free! Forever!
When death was arrested and...



1 John 3:1

¹See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Do you see yourself as a
dearly loved
child of God?

