

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

How many of you had a babysitter when you were younger? How many of you have ever been a babysitter? I had both experiences when I was younger, and even now Cynthia and I will babysit our grandchildren when we're visiting them in California. Having had these experiences then, I was to find that one of the meanings of the word translated as "disciplinarian" in our reading from Galatians can be "babysitter." Literally, in Greco-Roman society a "*paidagogos*" or slave who was responsible to oversee and discipline children until they reached maturity.

So the apostle Paul is telling us that the law was our babysitter, watching over us and disciplining us, until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. That is, made right before God by grace through faith. And because faith has come, because you and I have been given this gift by the grace of God, we are now children of God, baptized into Christ, clothed with Christ. That's what justification means, we are clothed with Christ by faith, growing in grace.

This then brothers and sisters, is primary because it means we are children of God, no longer subject to a babysitter or disciplinarian, children of God who are one in God. Now Paul tells us what I think is one of the most beautiful thoughts ever expressed. Clothed with Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, because we are one in Christ. Now of course we are still males and females, well off and poor, there are all kinds of differences between us. But here's the key, because we are one in Christ, we are in a new relationship, a revolutionary relationship. There are no longer any barriers or distinctions between us, the differences between us are no longer barriers between us, instead we can embrace and enjoy our diversity as people of God, knowing that as people of God, we are one in Christ!

So why is this important? Let's talk about what it means for you and me right now, today, tomorrow and for the rest of our lives. You and I have received abundant grace and blessings in Christ.

Since we belong to Christ, then we are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. A serious promise, and God never fails. So let's connect this promise with our gospel lesson. Imagine now a man who hasn't worn clothes for a long time, living among tombs, possessing the strength to break shackles and chains, a man with myriad demons who obviously isn't in his right mind. Yet the demons recognize the "Son of the Most High God," and plead with him not to be sent back into the abyss. Jesus orders the demons out, they enter into a herd of swine, rush down a steep hill in to the Sea of Galilee, and are drowned.

But the man is now in his right mind, clothed, and sitting at Jesus' feet. The attitude of a disciple, especially a disciple back in those times, sitting at the feet of the master. He wishes to go with Jesus but Jesus sends him back to his home, telling him to "declare how much God has done for you." And the man does just this,

proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus has done for him. This man has received abundant grace, he has been blessed, and he shares how much Jesus has done for him.

Now here's where the rubber meets the road as they say. I tell you, that you also are to be about proclaiming throughout the land how much Jesus has done for you. Now some of us disciples are called to stay home and proclaim, some of us are called to go elsewhere, everywhere, and proclaim. But all of us are called to proclaim. And what are we to proclaim? That through faith in Christ Jesus we are heirs according to the promise, that we have been freed from the chains and shackles of sin. We are to proclaim through the lives we live that we are one in Christ with all our brothers and sisters in faith. We are to proclaim through our lives what God has done for us, and what he will do for us, growing in grace, abundantly blessed, eternal life, salvation, by grace through faith. This is Good News, the best news! Proclaim it, show it, live it, share it!

AMEN