

Christianity is an offshoot of Judaism. Along with Muslims we trace our lineage of faith back to Abraham and Sarah who believed that the Lord God their God is One. Along with Jews we honor the Ten Commandments of Moses and the justice teachings of Israel's prophets. Along with Jesus communities of faith on the first Sunday after the birthday of the Church we celebrate the faith that makes us uniquely Christian: the Trinity . . . we believe in One God who invites human beings into relationship as Loving Parent, Incarnate Son, and Renewing Spirit. In today's reading from Romans the image of God as Loving Parent is expanded to that of Adoptive Parent and the identity of believer is changed from slaves of fear to heirs of grace. The few short verses cause us to wonder about how this new relationship of adoptive child and heir invites the Holy Spirit to put a positive spin into our lives.

#### Romans 8:12-17

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

#### "Adopted and Redeemed"

So then, if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:17)

I had not done much thinking about God as our Adoptive Parent until about a week ago when the Spirit of Adoption began meowing for the Ashton household to take her in. Kitty is a beautiful little black and white teenage beggar who is very skinny and hungry. Kitty sits at the front door and looks at me with starving eyes that say, "please, please, feed me." So, we do. Outside of course. Kitty is also very friendly. After she eats she meows at the front door to come in to take her nap. When we don't open the door for her she lays down outside the door so that she can jump up and rub on our legs whenever we come out. Mostly, Kitty is persistent in her attempts to adopt us. She simply won't give up. When we don't feed her right away she hikes her meowing up a notch, starts clawing at the door, and throws herself under our feet when we try to walk. Not even the "not on your life-get out of here-I'll tear you to bits if you step on my turf" barking of our dog Wags changes her determination to adopt us as her own.

Kitty now lives on our doorstep with an unwavering attempt to adopt us as her human family. The Adoptive Spirit of persistent pursuit, deep desire for intimacy, and need for compassionate care still fuels her meowing. Because God has a sense of humor, I think that Abba God is also sitting on the doorstep right next to her--- teaching hard hearted, resistant Ashton's about the Spirit of Adoption's unending passion to claim us and every other human being as Beloved children of God, and heirs of God's grace.

Meow, meow, meow. So then, if we are children, then we are heirs . . . I wonder, heirs of what? If we choose to let God adopt us, what is our inheritance? As heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ . . . what share of our Heavenly Parent's estate do we claim? What grace of Jesus' Spirit is rising within us to free us from earthly fear and to redeem us as beloved children of God?

Not long after Kitty had began her adoptive maneuvers with started to wonder if she had begun her meowing at our back because she had breathed in the good smells from our kitchen she hunted on the other side of the river. In my mind's eye to picture her watching the good times going on around our table in our screened in porch. With the eyes of my heart I started to imagine that she had been falling in love with us for a very long time.

So then, if we are children, then we are heirs . . . heirs of One of the gifts that we can receive from claiming our new identities as adoptive sons and daughters of God . . . is a spiritual awakening of the love within us to become passionate seekers of God. In mystics in every major religion we hear these words of wisdom concerning the truth of what lies within every soul: We have been in love with God for a very long time (from *I Heard God Laughing*, p. 146). In the Sufi tradition of Islamic mysticism the story is told of how the Spirit of Adoption freed a man named Kafir from an obsessive attachment to an earthly love by presenting him with a greater desire to seek God. *Once upon a time, there was a two hundred year old baker's assistant named Hafiz who delivered some bread to a girl and happened to catch a fleeting glimpse of a beautiful girl on the street. That one glimpse captured his heart, and he fell madly in love with her though she did not even notice him. She was from a wealthy noble family and he was a poor baker's assistant. She was beautiful, he was so physically unattractive---the situation was hopeless. As months went by Hafiz made up poems and began to repeat them; the poems were so touching that they became popular all over (his home town) of Shiraz. Hafiz was oblivious of his new fame as a poet; he thought only of the girl he loved. Desperate to win her, he undertook an arduous spiritual discipline that required him to keep a vigil at the tomb of a certain saint all night long for forty nights. It was said that anyone who could*

*accomplish this near-impossible austerity would be granted his heart's desire. Every day Hafiz went to work at the bakery. Every night he went to the saint's tomb and willed himself to stay awake for love of this gift. His love was so strong that he succeeded in completing this vigil. At daybreak on the fortieth day, the archangel Gabriel appeared before Hafiz and told him to ask for whatever he wished. Hafiz had never seen such a glorious, radiant being as Gabriel. He found himself thinking, "If God's messenger is so beautiful, how much more beautiful must God be!" Gazing on the unimaginable splendor of God's angel, Hafiz forgot all about the girl, his wish, everything. He said, "I want God!" Gabriel then directed Hafiz to a spiritual teacher who lived in Shiraz. The angel told Hafiz to serve this teacher in every way and his wish would be fulfilled. Hafiz hurried to meet his teacher, and they began their work together that very day (from *I Heard God Laughing*, p. 147-148).*

So then, if we are children, then we are heirs . . . heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. In Christianity we tell the story about how the Spirit of Adoption sparks within us the desire to become seekers of God through the suffering love of Jesus. In *Be Still and Know*, author Micahaela Bruzzese reminds us of the grace we inherit as co-heirs with Christ as Beloved sons and daughters of God: *God incarnate shares the good news: The last are first, the smallest shall blossom into the greatest of trees, the shamed and suffering shall receive healing and a place in God's reign. Death is not victorious. And when the demands of discipleship challenge us to move out of our comfort zones, when our fear is so great that we begin to fear fear itself, Jesus says, "Quiet! Be still." Whether we confront economic uncertainty, personal upheaval, or social instability, God reminds us that the one who orders chaos IS. . . is, was, and always will be there to claim us as God's own and to grace us with Christ's presence.*

So then, God does have a sense of humor. I'm also hoping that God is good and will send Kitty over to your house to do the Lord's meowing.