

Today's scripture is, I'm finding, one of the most complex combinations of words found in all of scripture. I can guarantee that if we tried to summarize the reading into 2 clean sentences, we would fail miserably because John, the writer, weaves the words together – twisting the meanings and talking about one thing and then going back to the last thing. Maybe one of the reasons why I like the book of John so much is that John, like me, is not a linear thinker – he's a web thinker.

And in our text today, 3 things stand out for me.

The first is this: Jesus calls God, Father, implying an intimacy, a closeness, a familiarity with a powerful presence much greater than we are. In this case, I believe Jesus' use of "Father," is suggesting a closeness and intimacy of relationship between a parent and a small child. Many of you have had children – or have had loving parents. Imagine a parent and a new baby or young child. So it is with God with us. Abba – Daddy.

Second, Abba, comes to live in us and we in live in God. That is, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God the loving parent, comes to live in us and we live in the Holy Spirit. There is a mutual, spiritual indwelling. We are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us. We ABIDE together.

Third, because of God, the Spirit, living in us, we reflect/demonstrate/ God's love/peace outwards.

So, within John's web-like writing style, there are three colored strands of yarn: God is called Father with all the intimacy that a loving parent brings. God comes and abides in us and we in God; and over time we take on the characteristics of God's love and reflect it outwards.

I have this strange sensation that overcomes me occasionally. Perhaps you have had similar experiences. I think you have. Sometimes when I walk past a mirror, I see someone in the corner of my eye and think it's my mom. Granted, when she was my age, she still dyed her hair brown and used curlers on Saturday night – but I still see her. Maybe it's the way my glasses sit on my nose, or maybe it's the shape of my head, or even the beautiful glossy white of my hair and the dark brown of my eyebrows – like I remember her to be so many years ago. Sometimes when I catch myself in the mirror, I have the strange sensation that my face is not my own, but my mom's from years ago.

Now this is not a new concept for me. When I went to kindergarten one of the first things my teacher told me – and I remember this vividly – was that I looked so much like my mom. You can imagine a 4 foot high 5 year old being told she looks just like her roly-poly, 5'3" mom... who just happened to look just like her even more roly polly 4'11" mom...who, I'm guessing, looked just like her mom and so on and so on. In many ways, I am my mother and my mother lives in me.

Or sometimes I find myself asking Luke and Anna a question...something like, "Will you come here please" and I find myself answering in a silly voice representing their voice – in a very pleasant and polite affirmative... Like this: Anna, will you come here please, "Yes, Mama, I'm on my way, thank-you."

I did not remember, until my sister Ruth reminded me this last April, that this too is something that my mother did. It's like my mother's voice is my voice. I could tell you so many other times too when I find her words and her ways creep into my ways.

Or another thing about my mother. She was not shy. She was bold and blunt. She was kind...but I'm not telling you what kind (I had to add one of my dad's favourite jokes there). She taught me the importance of honesty – especially when it came to being unashamed of who you are. And, while I'm not nearly as bold and blunt as she was, I still like to think that a lot of her confidence rubbed off on me and I like to think that I am like my mother in that I value honesty and integrity and I like to hang out with people that are unabashedly weirdos in the best sense of the word.

Now, lest you think I am only my mother's clone, I should also let you know that I definitely have a Toews personality. We are gregarious, dreamers, like to laugh and are good at seeing what's at the heart of people. That was my dad – when he was well – and that is me. It's as if my dad's and my uncles and cousin's laughter lives inside of me.

And so, I am suggesting to you this morning that my mom and my dad live inside of me. I have her hair, her body-type, her voice, her zeal for honesty – meshed in with his hearty laugh, penchant for random acts of generosity and a heart for anything in nature that is weird and different and wonderful. (Slide 7) I am simply a very enmeshed combination of my parents. Alice Margaret Krueger and Ernst Carl Toews live in Emily Agnes Toews.

If you knew my parents, you'd know me. If you know me, then you'd find my parents to be very familiar.

How did this come to be? Why am I so much like my parents? Well, I don't exactly know, other than to know that we are related. I have their genes and chromosomes. But just by daily being together growing up, they transmitted to me the qualities in a person that they deemed important – the good and the not great. They didn't try – it just happened.

It is with these images that we approach our scripture today. When Jesus says, "My father lives in me," I understand that. I understand that perfectly well because Ernie and Alice live in Emily.

I understand it perfectly well when Jesus says, "I live in my father and my father lives in me." All the same mannerisms of God the Father live in his Son. The Father's gentle love, the Father's patient forgiveness, the Father's compassion for everyone around him, the Father's willingness to die. All these qualities that Jesus had in him are the *same* qualities that Jesus got from his "old man."

When did it happen? When did Jesus get to be like God? The Bible tells us that they were the same nature. We read that in the beginning was the WORD (who we say is Christ) and the Word was with God and the word WAS God. Christ was a part of God's love, forgiveness, and compassion from the very beginning. Christ saw God's love, God's forgiveness, God's compassion.

And then, God came and lived with us in the flesh – Emmanuel, God with us - Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father because God lives within me – I am in my father – and my father is in me. We can understand that because we, too, may be like our parents and they are like us.

Then we read, "We will come and live in you." Just as the Father lives in the Son and the Son in the Father, so we will come and live in you. We, God; We, the Spirit; We, the Holy Spirit; we will come and live in you. The same love, the same compassion, the same forgiveness, the same gentleness, the same

kindness that was and is in God, now this same shining glorious presence of God is going to come and live in you...and me.

Well, how does this come to be? How do these divine qualities get into our lives? By walking with God, by talking with God, by working with God, by being around God, by hanging out with God. These qualities then gradually seep into our lives.

And we can understand that. We can understand that because people closest to us live in us. Their love, their compassion, their mannerisms, their values, their beliefs: they seep into our lives, and we don't even know it is happening.

The same way, God's Spirit seeps into our lives and we don't even know it is happening. Why? Because we hang out together; we walk together; we talk together; we work and play together.

When God comes to live in us, it is God's love that comes and lives in us. Love. Pure love. Absolute love.

And the result of all this loving living inside of you? When the love of Christ lives in you and you obey God's commandment to be a loving person, the outward result is peace, harmony, oneness with others.

That's what the Bible passage for today is all about. We need God's love to come in and live in us – all of us – everyone here at the church, in Ritzville, Moses Lake – everywhere.

Look at the fighting that goes on between denominations and non-denominational churches. How these groups of people fight with each other about who's in and who's out. What is it about people that we withhold love from people who don't agree with us?

When I was growing up, I heard from some religious leaders that Catholics weren't Christians, a belief which I refuted then and now. Presbyterians and Methodists – in the early days – fought about methods of governing the church. Just in 2010 the Lutheran Global association made a formal apology to the Mennonite World Conference – and Anabaptists all over the world for the persecution done in God's name to the early Anabaptists. Even now Baptists and Pentecostals – and even different factions within the Mennonites argue about how much water is necessary for a proper baptism. And I hear often in my discussion with people from other denominations the necessity for a deep and life changing conversion experience to validate one's being "born again".

Why is it that we always fight about religion? ... Christians have fought with each other throughout all of church history. And that's just between mostly European Christians. Now think about how these religious conflicts are magnified world-wide – stewing together in the same pot as colonialism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, white-supremacy, classism, you name it ism.

To this whole mess of a world Jesus' words to his disciples echo through the ages to inspire and motivate the few among us who would stand with Christ:

“Those who love me will keep my word,
and my Father will love them,
and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

And

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled,
and do not let them be afraid.

Do you see? The consequences of the love of Christ coming to live in ones' heart is peace, oneness, harmony.

This peace and harmony of Jesus Christ is not only to come into interdenominational conflicts and world conflicts at large - but also into congregations.

Congregations, like families, go through problems and people start biting at each other. "We like this pastor. We don't like that pastor. We like these people – we don't like those people. We like this music – we don't like that music...and so on.

But when a congregation is fighting amongst themselves, do you think they are focusing on the mission of the church? When a congregation is fighting with each other, do you think other people outside the church want to join that congregation? Do you want to be part of a congregational family where welcome is conditional?

Jesus reminds us that when God lives with us – within us. Within each of us in our congregation – and within the body at large. There can be no harmony or peace or even reconciliation if the love of God does not live within us.

It is not the fancy choirs, not the fancy organ, not a worship band, not fancy music, not the fancy hip and cool pastors, not the fancy building, not an amazing youth group and charismatic youth leaders, not the full – to brimming pews nor the amazing pot-lucks – or whatever you call them here in Washington. No. It is the QUALITY of LOVE shared among the community that can't HELP but leak out.

When we are full of God's love other people CANNOT HELP but notice

People want to be part of a community where there is an unusual amount of love and caring. Love comes when we open ourselves to the wildness of the wind of the Spirit when we open the doors of our heart and our church to let God come in and pitch a tent in our sanctuary. Love begets more love.

Do you get the sequence? One: God is pure love. Two: The love of God and Jesus and the Spirit comes and lives in us, takes residence up in us and lives in our body. Three: when God's love lives in us, we can't help but mirror God's love out to each other and to the world.

I am my father and mother and I live in their love. God lives in me. I cannot help but reflect God's love for me and for the world in what I do and say. Of course, I'm not perfect. But I am forgiven. Jesus said, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

May this also be with you; be with us.