

May 29, 2022 – John 17:20-26

Have you ever had people say to you, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” if they think you are acting in a manner that is similar to one or both of your parents? This saying or one like it is used often because many children do act like their parents in some ways.

While children are unique individuals they often have similar physical characteristics of one or both parents. How many times has someone told you they know which family you’re part of simply by looking at you? Your facial features or the shape of your body may remind them of your father or mother.

Most of us know that who we are is determined to some extent by who our parents are. What we do is often affected by what our parents have done. The way we speak, move, laugh, and other mannerisms may be so similar to our parent’s movement and laughter that it seems we are carbon copies of them. Not always, of course, but often.

What all of this tells us is that even though we are unique individuals with our own bodies, minds, thoughts, and actions, our parents will always be a part of us. Whether we think that is a good thing or not I can’t say. Regardless of how our parents treated us and the life example they have given us, their effect on us is usually something that remains with us for all of our lives. If we are parents ourselves, our own children will be affected by our actions and words. We will always be part of them, whether they want or appreciate that or not, and on and on it goes from one generation to the next.

Today’s scripture reading tells us that Jesus said these words to his disciples: “I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that

the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20-23 NRSV)

What Jesus seems to be saying in this bible passage is that God is in him and he is in God. Then Jesus goes on to ask that his disciples may also be in God just as he is in God. He claims that it is possible for his followers to be one with God just as he is one with God.

This is an amazing and wonderful claim by Jesus that I’m not sure we fully appreciate or believe. So often, we are taught that God is outside of us, up there somewhere or out there far away from us, watching over us, listening to our prayers from a distance and responding as God thinks is best for us. When we pray we often think of God as separate from us. But this bible passage tells us to pray to the God within us who is part of us. In fact, we are not even to pray TO God but to connect WITH God.

When we are young children or even adults with our own children, and if our own parents are still alive, we may go to them with questions or requests. We can do this because they are separate from us and we can speak to them and then listen to their response or benefit from their actions on behalf of our requests. However, if our own parents are no longer alive we can no longer go to them for advice, but we can draw on our past experiences with them to make a connection to them in the present because they continue to live on within us in some manner. Their teachings, their actions, their love for us and for others resides within us and because of that we are in them and they are in us, even after they have experienced a physical death.

I believe this is what the author of the gospel of John is trying to tell the followers of Jesus when he wrote his gospel some 70 or so years after the death of Jesus. He is assuring them that God and Jesus are one and that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, they too can be one with them. He is reminding them that even though Jesus is no longer physically alive, he is present within them, and they can choose to make use of that or not.

Through the Holy Scriptures we have some of the words of Jesus and his teachings. We are made aware of how he acted and lived on this earth and can learn from him. However, through the Holy Spirit we can also continue to hear his words, sense his guidance, and feel his presence. This, I think, is what this bible reading from John's gospel is telling us.

You know, even though some of us no longer have our parents or grandparents physically with us, they are still part of us. And even though most of us would likely not make some of the same choices they may have made simply because they lived in a different time, they are still part of us. Hopefully, they have left us with many good memories and have taught us through their own words and example how to be good and kind people. Hopefully we have learned from them that loving one another is the most important thing we can ever do. Hopefully we are able to appreciate the good things and not so good things that happened in their own lives that shaped and molded them into the people they were just as our own experiences will form us into the people we are. Hopefully, our own children and grandchildren will appreciate who we are and why we did what we did when they are older and we are no longer here. Because, like it or not, we will be part of them.

God is not only like an earthly parent to us but also a spiritual parent who is connected to us in ways we cannot fully understand. I hope this illustration today of how we are connected to our own parents will help us to appreciate how we are connected to our heavenly or spiritual parent. To truly benefit from our connection with God we should put aside our understanding of God as separate from us, out there somewhere, listening and responding to our prayers from afar.

Instead, let us understand, realize, and know that God is within us, always present, always listening, and always ready to lead and guide us.

What Jesus said to his first disciples he says to us: As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us ... so that they may be one, as we are one.