

“Abba, Father”

(The children gather around me as I sit on the floor in front of the altar.) What do you think God is like? Do you think that God wants to be really *far* from you? (I go and stand at the back of the farthest row of choir chairs), or *near* you? (I come back and sit with them. They say “near.”) Do you think God *ignores* you (I stand up, fold my arms and turn my back to them), or wants to *help* you? (I sit down again and put my arm around the nearest kid. “God wants to help us”, the kids say.) Do you think God is *weak* (I “struggle” to lift a ballpoint pen), or do you think God is *strong*? (I stand up and flex my biceps. (“Strong”, the kids say.)

God is **strong**, wants to be **near** us and **help** us. One way we know that is from the *prayer* that Jesus taught us. Can anyone tell me the first two words of the Lord's Prayer? (“Our Father.”) Now, in the language Jesus used, the word translated “Father” was “Abba”. Can you say that with me? (“Abba.”) Now you know a word of First Century Aramaic, just like St. Paul was using in today's second Bible reading!

“Abba” is an Aramaic word which doesn't mean “Father” is some very formal~ remote way, but in a warm, close, powerful way. **It really means “Daddy.”**

You can read things in books, but it's different if you *experience* something that helps you to really get it, right? Same for me. I'd read about this meaning in books, but I first really “got it” when I was sitting in Ben Gurion Airport in Israel~ having a cup of coffee while waiting for a ride to Jerusalem.

Anybody here ever been *lost*? (I look at the kids and then at the rest of the congregation; some hands go up.) Anyone here ever lost track of one of your kids? (I look at the congregation while raising my own hand and some more hands go up.) Scary, isn't it? Ever been in a big airport, with thousands of people you don't know? Well, while I was waiting in this airport, suddenly I saw a little girl, about four years old, who was *lost*. All she could see was thousands of knees, none of which she recognized. She was screaming, crying with fear, and the word she was screaming was “ABBA! ABBA!” (I pick up a little girl, with her permission and her father's.) And then her **Abba** came out of the crowd and found her, picked her up in his powerful arms and hugged her, and all was right with the world. (I return the little girl to her father.)

That's what that word means. Two words into the Lord's Prayer, we know that God is **strong** and wants to be **near** us and **help** us like a perfect father, especially when we really need him, just like that little girl's Abba was for her. (I look at the whole congregation.) And no matter how grown up we get, *we still have days* when we need God to be strong, near and help us.

And *that's just* what God wants to be for us. Remember that every time you say the Lord's Prayer!

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