

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Romans 8:14-17

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Happy Birthday, Church! Today we celebrate Pentecost which for the Christian is the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit, as was promised by Jesus. He told his disciples that even though he would be leaving them to join His Heavenly Father, they would not be left alone to continue the mission of building God's kingdom. The Holy Spirit would bring the Spirit of God and himself upon them, making them one with the Holy Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and making them one with one another. They would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus. This same Spirit comes to fill all who choose to believe in and follow Jesus—that's followers like you and me.

The Spirit did come upon the disciples as they were gathered in a room to pray. Surely, they were asking themselves, "Where is this Spirit? When will it come? How will we know it when it arrives?" When it finally came upon them, they had no doubt about its arrival. Others who came from all over for the feast of Pentecost and who were within earshot of the disciples heard them speak in many languages, making it so that everyone could hear and understand the good news that the disciples had to share that day. Those hearing the disciples did not understand how it was possible for the disciples to speak unknown languages, not of their native tongue; leaving some to think the disciples were drunk, but Peter assured them they were not. It was the Holy Spirit speaking through them.

A Baptist preacher and his wife decided they needed a dog. Ever mindful of their congregation, they knew the dog must also be Baptist. They visited an expensive kennel and explained their needs to the manager, who assured them he had just the dog for them.

When the dog was produced, the manager began giving it commands. "Fetch the Bible," he commanded. The dog bounced to the bookshelf, scrutinized the books, located the Bible, and brought it to the manager. The manager then said, "Find Psalms 23". The dog, showing marvelous dexterity with his paws, leafed thru the Bible, found the correct passage, and pointed to it with his paw.

Duly impressed, the preacher and his wife purchased the dog. That evening a group of parishioners came to visit. The preacher and his wife began to show off the dog, having him locate several Bible verses. The visitors were amazed.

Finally, one man asked, "Can the dog do normal dog tricks too?"

"Let's see" said the preacher. Pointing his finger at the dog, he commanded, "Heel!"

The dog immediately jumped up on a chair, placed one paw on the preacher's forehead and began to howl. The preacher turned to his wife in complete shock and disbelief. "We've been swindled! That manager sold us a Pentecostal dog!"

Often when people not understanding the Holy Spirit, think of Pentecost, they think of speaking in tongues are turned off. But Pentecost is much more than that. We must put this in

proper perspective. Those who see Pentecost's main significance as miraculous powers are missing the new thing that was being done, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It is like someone who receives a beautifully wrapped birthday gift. After carefully removing the velvet ribbon and the expensive paper, the lovely box is opened to reveal the keys to a fancy new Mercedes automobile! But then this confused person tosses aside the keys with a "That's nice." then turns and goes back to the wrapping in which they came. "Wow! What a beautiful box! What wonderful ribbon! What gorgeous wrapping! I love it! I'm going to keep this ribbon and box and paper forever!" We must be careful not to confuse the Pentecostal gift with the wrappings in which it came.

When we turn to Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul addresses the work of the Holy Spirit as it comes upon and fills the believer. The sign that one is filled with the Holy Spirit is not necessarily whether they receive the gift of speaking in tongues, although that could happen.

For Paul, the emphasis is on the relationship between God and God's people—that God's Spirit is intimately involved with ours. The Spirit makes us one with God and works through our spirits to share the Good News of Jesus Christ through our words and actions.

Paul uses the metaphor of adoption to describe this relationship with God that the Spirit creates for us. He speaks of the Christian being adopted into the family of God. When we understand how serious and complicated the adoption process was for the Romans to whom he was speaking, we can better understand the depth of his message.

What made adoption so difficult was the tradition—the cultural belief that the father of a household had absolute power over the family. The father had absolute control. A Roman son never came of age, no matter how old he was, he was still under his father's absolute possession and control. This is why adoption was very difficult to accomplish. In adoption a person had to pass from one father's possession and control to another.

There were two required steps to make this happen. It was a complicated process, which I hope I can accurately summarize with William Barclay's help. "The first step was known as the *mancipatio*, and was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were symbolically used. Three times the symbolism of the sale was carried out. Twice the Father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back; but the third time he did not buy him back and thus the father's control was understood to be broken.

There followed then a ceremony called *vindicatio*. The adopting father went to one of the Roman magistrates and presented a legal case for the transference of the person to be adopted into his fatherly control. When all of this was completed, the adoption was complete. These were serious and impressive steps that had to be taken for the adoption process.

For Paul, the consequences of the adoption were of great significance. There were four main consequences associated with adoption. 1) The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. In the most binding legal way, he got a new father.

Secondly, the adopted child became an heir to his new father's estate. Even if other sons were born following his adoption, it did not affect his rights; he simply became a co-heir to his new father's estate.

Thirdly, according to the law, the old life of the adopted person was totally wiped out, including even their debts. Everything was completely wiped out! He was regarded as a new person entering into a brand-new life with which the past had no connection to him.

And finally, in his new life, in the eyes of the law, he was absolutely the son of his new father.

This is what Paul had in mind when he used the metaphor of adoption. There was one other image Paul used from the Roman adoption process. Paul said that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we really are children of God. You see, the Roman adoption process was carried out before seven witnesses; that way if any family disputes arose after the father of the household died such, as disputes over the rights of inheritance, one or more of the witnesses could step in to settle the dispute. The sworn witness would verify the legitimacy of the adoption and the rights of the adopted child to his inheritance.

All of this is to say that a huge price was paid, that being the sacrifice of our Savior for our adoption into the family of God, and the Holy Spirit is the witness to our adoption into God's family. Where sin once possessed us, all of our debts have been forgiven; we are free from our past and now we are made new and given a totally new life with God as our Father and Jesus Christ as our brother.

As God's adopted children we are free to know him in the most intimate sense. Paul tells us that we know him as "Abba." The Aramaic word "abba" means "father," but it's really more intimate than that. A better translation is "daddy." So, when we call God "abba," we are claiming the kind of close and loving relationship that many children often have or long to have with their daddy or mommy. A relationship where they are accepted and loved, even when they fail or disappoint.

David Slagle from Lawrenceville, Georgia writes, "My twenty-one-month-old, who had just learned to say, 'Daddy,' had been struggling with asthma and an ear infection for two weeks. He coughed and sneezed continually, and his nose ran like a faucet. Each night when I came home, he ran to meet me at the door, smiling, coughing, nose running, yelling, 'Daddy! Daddy!'

I was not repulsed by his runny nose or close-range sneezes in the least (he 'slimed' every shirt I own!). I love him deeply and enjoy his love for me.

It does remind me, though, that when I am sick with sin, God loves me, deeply and desires that I run to him as a child, crying, 'Abba, Father'". When we call upon Abba, God does not reject us even when we have been less than perfect because his deep, deep desire is to have us close to him.

As adopted children, we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (v. 17). As heirs, we can expect to receive the grace and love and guidance of God—gifts that are given to us not because we earn them, but because we inherit them. As members of God's family, we are given the right and the privilege to walk hand in hand with God and follow his ways, revealing to the world the presence of God through our words and actions. This happens because as God's adopted children we also are privileged to inherit the Holy Spirit, who leads us.

But adopted children have responsibilities as well as rights and privileges. We may be heirs of God and joint heirs with our brother Jesus Christ, but along with this, Paul tells us, "We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him." That means there's a certain amount of pain that comes from walking in the Spirit, because the path we walk is the way of the cross. It is other-centered, which means we have the desires of others at the heart of our decision-making; we are other-serving, rather than self-serving; we are reconciling, meaning we are focused on the healing of broken relationships; and we are interdependent. That's living in harmony with the people around us.

Such a path isn't easy to walk, but it is a walk that is grounded in hope. If we read on in chapter 8, we hear Paul say in verses 20-25 that: "In hope ... we wait ... in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

The Holy Spirit brings us this hope just as it did to the disciples long ago when it arrived on the first day of Pentecost. They needed hope to continue the mission. Hope is what kept them moving ahead, and it is what keeps us moving forward in faith. It is what motivates us to listen to God when we're faced with fear and sufferings. Hope sets us free to throw away old fears of death and decay and follow the Spirit's leading. We have this hope because we now know we are adopted children in God's family"

When we walk in the Spirit, we may have to suffer with Christ. But when we follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and walk in the way of Jesus, we can be confident that we are playing a part in the plan that God has for the healing of the entire world. In time, says Paul, "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God"

Until then, we keep moving in the direction the Spirit leads us. We claim our adopted rights and walk boldly with God. Our focus is like that of our brother Jesus on being other-centered, other-serving, reconciling and interdependent, showing unconditional love to the people around us. We hope for what we do not see, and wait for it with patience. Each of us needs to know and can find that assurance from the Spirit in us that God is working to perfect God's design in us even as we suffer with Christ and are glorified with Christ.

You can be confident that God will direct you every step of the way -- sometimes through suffering and adversity -- knowing that "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (v. 37). Nothing in life or in death or anything else "in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38-39).

On this Pentecost Sunday, feel the Spirit in you—the Spirit that is a witness to your adoption into God's family—and all that that entails, including your freedom from sin's power over you and your inheritance of grace, love and glory along with your brother Jesus Christ. Allow the Spirit to lead you confidently to fulfill your responsibilities as a child of God so that they whole world will one day be free to accept their adoption into God's family. Amen.