

“Life in the Holy Spirit, Part 2 of 3: Our Inheritance as God’s Children”
A Homily by the Rev. Gary Coffey at Grace Church, 7/23/17

This morning we are going to continue our thinking about living a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Last week, we listened to the first 14 verses of Paul’s letter to the Romans and talked about the difference between trying harder to obey God’s Law, (which was the way before Christ came), and embracing the work of the Holy Spirit within us, (which is the way since Christ came).

The huge difference between the two is that before Christ came, folks tried to keep the law using their own strength and resources and were unable to do so. This resulted in a life of futility, striving and frustration as they could never overcome the sin in their lives that robbed us and them of the joy that God has for us.

Then Jesus came to earth as a human being, and showed us firsthand Who God is (as He and God are One), and eventually died on the Cross for the sin of the world, and as the Eucharistic prayer says, by His death, He destroyed death and made the whole creation new. After Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, everything changed.

After Jesus ascended to the Father, then the Holy Spirit was sent to earth to indwell every human being who is open to receive the Spirit. Jesus, through His life, death and resurrection, blazed the trail for the Spirit to come and indwell us. And, as we saw last week, this changed everything. With the God who sang the world into existence living in us, we finally have the power to overcome the sin in our lives and move into the joy that God always intended for us to have.

In many ways, it is a return to the fellowship that God had with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before sin ever came into the picture. We read in Genesis that God used to walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening.

Now with God’s Spirit living in us, we can again walk with God in the cool of the evening. Total and complete reconciliation with God has been restored. This

brings us to today's encouragement from the middle section of Romans 8, St. Paul's description of this new life we have been given in the Holy Spirit.

I don't think that we need to read it together word for word, but you might want to have it handy in case you want to refer to it as we consider it together.

Last week, we were told that we are to embrace what the Holy Spirit is doing in us. This week, we get a few more of the specifics about how that happens and our part in cooperating with the Spirit.

In verse 12, St. Paul reminds us who we are in Christ Jesus. We are no longer debtors to the flesh which would imply that we are enslaved to our sinful desires. Rather, in this new Spirit-filled life, we are called to put to death the deeds of the body, or put to death our sinful desires.

Again, going back to what, I think, comes from a native American story of our struggle being like two wolves fighting within us, the wolf of the flesh (championing our selfish sinful desires), and the wolf of the Spirit, (championing this new life that we have been given in and through Jesus). As the story goes, the elder is asked, "Which wolf will win?" And the answer given is "the one that you feed."

So, day by day, and even moment by moment, St. Paul says that our part in this life in the Spirit is starving the wolf of the flesh and feeding the wolf of the Spirit.

For example, a coworker has been spreading a rumor about you at the office that is malicious and not true. The wolf of the flesh within us cries out for vengeance and retaliation. Acts of vengeance and retaliation will feed that wolf.

The wolf of the Spirit is nudging us to handle it differently, perhaps by going to the person and talking to him about what you are hearing, and asking him if he knows anything about this. When you handle matters with a measure of love and truth, rather than retaliation and vengeance, you are "putting to death the deeds of the body". You are rejecting the old way of the flesh and moving more fully into the life of the Spirit. You are feeding the wolf of the Spirit

My point is that we have a part in embracing the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

The second thing that is noteworthy in this passage and instructive in living this new life of the Spirit is remembering who we are as God's children, brothers and sisters of Christ Jesus and heirs of God, with all of the rights and privileges and inheritance that comes with our adoption as God's children.

Perhaps the most valuable part of that inheritance is knowing that God Almighty is our Abba, our Papa, our Dad and that we are God's precious children.

When I was in Israel at the wailing wall, that unfortunately has been the site of terrorist activity in the last week or two; when I was there, a little Hebrew child called out to his father, "Abba, Abba" and then ran to his father and was swept up into his arms.

This, Beloved, is our relationship with the Living God. St. Paul points out that what this means to us is that we have an incredible amount of security in this parent-child relationship with God. He says that because of this, there is no reason for us ever to fall back into fear, the fear of being alone, the fear of not being seen after, the fear of not being cared for, because all of these fears are gone. They are no longer a part of our reality as God's children.

In fact, the opposite of faith or trust is not unbelief. The opposite of faith or trust is fear. Because, we are the children of this God who is trust-worthy, we never have to live in fear again, no matter what should happen to us in our lives.

Remember, one of the Names of God is Immanuel which means God is with us. And not only is God with us, God, like any loving parent, will never ever leave us nor forsake us. Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age, or the end of the world."

No, we are not immune to suffering, but the suffering is nothing compared to the glory that will eventually be revealed to us. Suffering, unfortunately, is a part of living in this world. But God's Spirit allows us to see beyond the suffering to the glory of God, and the comfort of God and the security in God's arms, now and forever. And the even better news is that nothing or no one can take that security away from us.

The last thing that I want to mention is groaning and hope. Eugene Peterson reminds us that St. Paul compares this groaning and hope that we have in Jesus to a pregnancy.

St. Paul writes, “We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we’re certainly going to go through the good times with him!

¹⁸⁻²¹ That’s why I don’t think there’s any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. The created world itself can hardly wait for what’s coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens.

²²⁻²⁵ All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it’s not only around us; it’s *within* us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We’re also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don’t see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.”

I am reminded of that old gospel hymn, “This earth is not my home. I’m just passing through.” That is the sense of this groaning and hope. Way back in 1989, Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon, who have both been associated with Duke Divinity School, wrote a book called *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something is Wrong*. When I looked this book up on Amazon, I was intrigued to see that they updated it in 2014, which leads us to believe that the feeling that we as Christians are resident aliens has not changed, but most likely has been exacerbated in our day and time.

As Christ-followers, we feel a little, (and at times even more than a little) ill at ease, because this is NOT our home. We are resident aliens on this earth. We are fellow pilgrims journeying through this world toward a better world. So, presently we groan a bit as we await whatever you want to call it, the Second Coming of our

Lord, the end of the world, the consummation of the age, the arrival of the new heaven and new earth. Yes, we groan, but we groan with great hope because like St. Paul, we know the One in whom we have put our trust, and we are sure that God is able to guard until that day what we have entrusted to Him.

In other words, as Elaine Potter said to me one day, "God's got this". Amen.