



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
www.mzluth.org

June 7, 2009
1st Sunday after Pentecost
Romans 8:14-17
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 6:1-8
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 150
Second Lesson: Romans 8:14-17
Gospel: John 3:1-17

Freed From Slavery to Fear

Because of the Spirit's testimony
Because the Father adopted you
Because the Son suffered for you

Misunderstanding a few words, or not understanding a few words completely, can cause us a lot of grief and suffering. Early in my ministry I was in a hospital room with someone, and quite often in a hospital room a doctor comes in to talk with a patient. I sit off in my corner and stay there while they talk. I listened as they were talking and I thought I heard this member of mine getting good news from the doctor. After the doctor left, I noticed the member was pretty troubled and their body language didn't seem to jive with what I thought I had heard. So I asked what was bothering them. They had misunderstood a portion of what the doctor had said and they thought they had received bad news. I don't remember exactly what the issue was, but I remember telling them they better talk to the doctor again and ask questions so they understood it clearly, because "this is what I thought I heard." It turned out that the prognosis, or what was going on, was going well, but this person, because they didn't understand their doctor completely at that point in time, which is understandable when you are worried and stressed out and don't think clearly; that's a completely understandable thing, but they had more anxiety and more grief and more fear because they didn't understand completely.

I'm not here to tell you that when you and I understand the Trinity completely all of our stress and anxiety and fear in this world will be gone. First of all, God has never said that. Secondly because God has never told us that we can understand the Trinity because we are sinners and he is a Holy God. But there are certain things he has revealed to us, not about the nature of how the Trinity interacts because that remains a mystery, but he has revealed to us what the Trinity has done for us so that we can live free from slavery to fear. We might have many things that cause us concern, but we don't have to live in fear because we can see what our Triune God has done for us. That is exactly what the Holy Spirit is trying to have Paul communicate to the Romans in this section of Romans 8.

In the first six chapters of Romans, he had talked at length about sin and grace and how we can't approach God on our own and we have to approach God only on the basis of what Jesus has done for us. That is the best way to approach God because it depends completely on him and nothing upon us. It's all his undeserved love that has taken

away our sins through Jesus' life and death. He has made that point again and again and stressed it in the first six chapters.

Then at chapter seven and eight he starts talking about what Jesus has done for you and how that changes you. He begins to talk about how we live now in response to what God has done for us; how we live to glorify God, to thank God, to praise God. We don't live to serve ourselves as Christians. We don't live to serve only other people. Above all, we live to serve God. We do that at times by serving ourselves as we grow in faith and by serving others and loving others, we glorify God. But our chief goal is always to glorify God.

He was talking about that in this section leading up to this point in Romans. That's good, and we need to know that and we need to know that only what God has done for us through Jesus enables us to live for God in the right way and for the right reasons, out of love for him and out of thanks for what he has done for us. But the fact of the matter is that you and I don't always do this, right? We know at times what God wants us to do, but we are that little two-year-old in the checkout aisle that is screaming for that candy bar. We want to do what we want to do. We want to go our own way.

So there are times when you and I sin against the God of all grace, the God who we know has loved us and forgiven us. We sin and we go our own way. We go away from God and we do things that God has told us not to do. Or we don't do the things that God has told us to do.

Now we are faced with guilt. We are faced with the guilt and the anxiety of wondering "Will God still love me because I have done what he has told me not to do?" We are faced with the guilt and anxiety of "How are my other Christian friends going to view me if they know what I've done? How are they going to view me? Can I even show my face before them again or are they going to just shake their finger at me and shake their head and turn away from me?" There's that uncertainty. There's that slavery to the fear that I won't be welcomed by God or by my fellow believers, and the devil jumps on that. He seizes upon that. He jumps on that and tells us "That's exactly the case. Don't even bother to go back to God. He doesn't want you. Your fellow Christians, all they are doing when they turn their heads away from you is to talk about you. They don't love you. They never did. They are just there to make your life miserable. They think that they are so much better than you are."

All of these uncertainties come and there are things that Satan is going to use to try to keep us away from the one thing that is so important for us—God's love for us in Christ. He is going to do whatever he can to keep us from that Word, to keep us from the Sacrament, to keep us from remembering our Baptism, that beautiful hymn we sang this morning which tells us of the assurance we have when we screw up.

In that context, Paul then writes to the Romans and reminds them "You are led by the Spirit of God. You want to do what is right, and even when you screw up, you know that you have sinned. But don't let it make you think you are no longer a son of God." He

very deliberately uses the Greek word for “son” that isn’t just highlighting maleness, but it is highlighting the one who is the full heir, the one who stands to receive everything that the Father has. This is his point. Our assurance is that we are always standing in God’s love by faith because of what God has done, not what we do. If we have to rely only upon what we do, we could never stand without shaking knees because we are always going to screw up. But you and I stand, not on ourselves, we stand on what our God has done for us. And he says “You want to be sure of this? Then listen to the testimony of the Spirit.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

The Spirit testifies to this in our Baptism where we have been clothed with Christ. The Spirit testifies to this in the Word. If we want to be certain that we stand loved by God, and if we want to be certain that we can approach God, if we want to be certain that our fellow Christians who are living their faith will welcome us with open arms, look at the testimony of the Spirit. Don’t use the excuse that “Well, anyone can make God’s Word say whatever they want it to say, so I’m not even going to dig into it myself because some believe this and some believe that, and I’ve heard someone say something else, so it’s obvious I could never understand it.” Get over it. The Spirit of God is going to testify to your heart if you get into his Word. And he will tell you and lead you into all truth. That’s why he puts us together with other believers, so that as iron sharpens iron, one man may sharpen another so that we learn and grow from the insights that the Spirit has given to each other. If we aren’t willing to do that, we just aren’t willing to know.

Then we are causing ourselves to live in the uncertainty of “Will God love me or forgive me, or won’t he?” Then we have to fall back onto just the ideas of this world. And I’m telling you, the ideas of this world, when it comes to spiritual things, just flat out stink. Wipe them off your feet before you walk into the house because it’s going to smell up your carpet.

You need to be in the Word of God. You need to be in your Baptism daily. You need to be receiving his body and blood properly prepared for the forgiveness of your sins because that’s how the Spirit is going to testify to you. It doesn’t matter what you have done, you need to focus on what God has done for you.

The Spirit’s testimony points us over and over to the Father and to the Son and to the confidence we can have. He says the Spirit testifies so that we can cry out “Abba, Father.” By that Spirit, the Spirit of son-ship, we cry “Abba, Father.” We can cry out to God, not judge, Holy God. We don’t have to address him only that way, even though that’s what he is, but we have the privilege of addressing him as a loving child addresses a loving father, as Luther writes in the Explanation to the Address of the Lord’s Prayer. We speak to him on terms that we have no rights to claim except that he gives us these terms and he says “I have made you my child through the gift of faith. I have made you my child through the working of the Spirit. You can address me as Father and know that I love you and that I care for you desperately.”

We don't deserve that. You and I will do things that will cause us at times perhaps to doubt that. But don't live in that fear of that doubt, that slavery to doubt. Get back into the Word of God and hear the Father say, "I love you. I sent my one and only Son into the world so that you might have life through him" as Jesus told Nicodemus.

The Holy, Holy God, whom the angels had to cover their face and their feet because they were in his presence, is the God who has said to us, "Call me Father. Know that I love you. Know that I will always be with you and I will empower you to forgive and love others in ways you never thought you could."

Those are incredible gifts that our God gives to us. Why would we want to push them to the side? Why would we want to say "I've got a better way"? Why would we want to say "I want to see someone else suffer more for what they have done to me"? When we walk in the newness of life that is Jesus and the Father and the Spirit, we put our pettiness aside and we say "Lord, teach me to love as you have loved me. Teach me to embrace others with love as you embraced me when I was unlovable."

As we do that, we grow. And if we are still uncertain, look at what the Spirit says. He says, "We have received the Spirit of son-ship. We are God's children. If we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ if indeed we suffered with him." Not that he is saying that our sufferings pay for our sins but that when we are in Christ, his sufferings apply to us. What our sins deserve he carried on his shoulders.

Is there any doubt in your mind that Jesus carried all of your sins to the cross? Is there any doubt in your mind that you share in the sufferings or that other Christians share in his sufferings because they believe that he took all of that sin to the cross and endured the hell that you and I deserve? If we've paid attention, if we've looked at the Spirit's testimony, there is no doubt. There is no uncertainty, so there should be no slavery to fear.

Christ lived. Christ died. Christ has risen again. This means I'm forgiven. You're forgiven. The person who has hurt you stands forgiven. And if they are wandering away from that truth, God wants you and me to be the ones that point them back to Jesus' sufferings in their place so that they return and walk with Jesus, and walk with him in faith.

This is the only thing that is going to set us free from slavery to fear, to soul-crushing fear of what happens when I die. Set free from this fear, we can begin to love and forgive each other as God has loved and forgiven us.