

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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June 11, 2006
Trinity Sunday
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

Fearlessly Follow the Triune God

What makes you afraid?—I mean real fear, real gripping fear in the pit of your stomach that almost paralyzes you and keeps you from moving? Is it the fear of flying? Is it the fear of heights? For my older brother who used to pick on me at times, there was nothing to me, as a young child, more hilarious than his fear of snakes because I wasn't afraid of them. So it was great fun when I would find a garden snake in the back yard and get it some place and get my brother over there and watch my big brother run away and squeal in a pitch I didn't think he could quite hit. It's amazing how the sinful nature can warp things, isn't it? It can turn fear into something that is our entertainment.

Fear—one of the things a lot of people say they are afraid of or have a fear of is speaking in public. Can you imagine what fear would be like if you were at your work and your boss says, "You have to give this presentation tomorrow. You have to give it perfectly and when I mean perfectly, your grammar has to be perfect. No 'uh' or 'um'. No missteps—everything absolutely flawless and perfect. Not just the content, but also the delivery. No missteps whatsoever or you are out of here!" So how much do you think you would sleep that night?

No boss would ever make that kind of demand of us, would he? But our God has, hasn't he? When Paul writes to the Romans and says that we have received this Spirit of sonship so that we are no longer a slave again to fear, the fear he is talking about is being a slave to the law. That we have to keep every little bit of God's law perfectly, absolutely perfectly—love your God above all else and love your neighbor as yourself and do that perfectly. Not just in your actions, but also in your words and also in your thoughts, or you are going to hell.

How would you like it if I said "Amen" right there? "Go home. Have a nice day. That is God's message for you today." That wouldn't be a whole lot of fun, would it? That would be a gripping fear that if you are going to live under the law and approach God on the basis of your efforts, you would have to live with it. You would have to come to grips with it. You would have to learn to either deny that fear or get rid of it some other way.

But as we gather together this morning on Trinity Sunday, we are reminded by the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul that we can fearlessly follow the Triune God, because the Triune God has acted in time and through means to take away our fears, to take away our worries and anxieties and enable us to live with the confidence that is the envy of people who don't know Christ. That confidence is ours as we fearlessly follow the Triune God because as we are reminded this morning, the Holy Spirit leads us. He

testifies with us, to us. We can also fearlessly follow the Triune God because the Father hears us. He is no longer separated from us because of our sins. That wall has been broken down so he hears us when we cry out to him. And finally, because the Son has suffered for us. That is why you and I can fearlessly follow the Triune God.

Paul wrote to the Romans, and if you remember, he was writing to some Christians that he had never met. It is one of the two letters that he wrote to a group that he had not known personally before he wrote to them. That is why it is fascinating to read the beginning chapters of Romans, because you get what Paul—if you had sat in the synagogue and listened to him teach early in the 50's-60's A.D., Romans 1 to about 8 is what you would have heard him teach about sin and grace, because he is writing and he is teaching these people that he had never met. It is fascinating to read how clearly he lays out the law in its full fury. He doesn't soft pedal it. He doesn't cushion it. He says, "Do all this or you are going to hell." Then he says, "That is the demand of the law. But here is the undeserved love of our God, the grace that he has showed to us. He sent Christ, who did it all in our place, and took it all away and it is by grace we are saved through faith—not by works."

Then he says, "This isn't just something that has no effect on you. It is something that changes the way you live as a Christian." He is starting to get into the section that we are in and how we now live for God. We want to keep that law perfectly—not because we have to, but because we want to thank God, who in his love delivered us when we couldn't do it ourselves. But he also recognizes that as Christians who are striving to be perfect and honor God in their thoughts, words and actions, we are going to fall short. As we fall short, the devil is going to come to us and say, "You can't be a Christian. A Christian doesn't do what you just did. A Christian doesn't think what you just thought. A Christian doesn't say what you just said. You can't be a Christian" is the devil's constant plea in our ear. That creates fear.

So in the section that we are looking at, Paul talks about living fearlessly. Here is why you can live fearlessly. It is not because of who you are or what you have done to make you who you are. It is what God has done to make you who you are. It is the Triune God that has acted in time. The Spirit leads you is what he says. He testifies with your Spirit that you are a child of God. How does the Holy Spirit testify to that? How does he speak to us that way? How does he lead us? Does he come into our ear and blow in our ear and say, "This way people. Let's go over here." Does he talk to us in the middle of the night through dreams and visions? He did in the past, but it seems like now God tells us that he doesn't talk that way anymore. Now he acts through the Spirit through the means of grace.

Think of how the Spirit has testified to your individual heart. At a time when you probably don't remember, God brought you, your parents brought you to God at maybe this altar or this font, maybe another font like it somewhere else—maybe it was in the hospital, maybe it was in your parents' home—but somewhere along the line, someone took some water and the Word of God and the Spirit testified through that water and that Word of God that you have been baptized into Christ's life and into his death and your sins have been taken away. And every time that you repent of your sins, as we did a little bit ago, you are going right back to that same water and the Spirit is testifying

again. Your sins have been drowned in Christ. Here is the testimony. Christ has done it all. You can live without fear because Christ has forgiven your sins.

The Spirit leads us into the Word. It takes us by the hand and leads us into the Word. In that Word, what do we find? We find God, who loves us so desperately and so completely that he wants us to know what is on his mind. You don't have to say to God, "Penny for your thoughts." They are right there. You don't have to guess. It isn't like understanding your spouse and what they are thinking. God has told you what he is thinking and what he wants you to know.

So you open the Bible and you read and the Spirit testifies. Here is how much God has loved you. Here is what he has been willing to do for you. Here is who you are, and that is scary, but here is who God is and he is greater than your sins and that is the most incredible comfort in the world. You can live without fear. The Spirit testifies. You come to this altar, you kneel on these pads or you stand in front of that bar and the Spirit testifies to you that this is the very body and blood that took away your sins. You are forgiven. You don't have to live as a slave again to the fear of the law that you have to earn God's favor by doing good and being good. God has given you his favor by making you good through faith in Jesus Christ.

Think of what he says that means for us. That means for us that we can cry out to the Father, "Abba, Father" and he hears us. It doesn't sound that surprising. We are used to all of our life having prayed, "Our Father, who art in heaven." We are used to calling God "Father" all the time. But the Book of Isaiah tells us that we shouldn't be able to. In Isaiah it says that your sins have separated you from God so that he will not hear when you call on him (see Isaiah 59:2). Because of our sins, we don't have a right to claim that God has to hear and listen to us when we call to him. But because God acted in Christ and knocked down that barrier of sin, we now have this promise from God that he hears our prayers and answers us because, through Christ, we have been made children of God. We have received the Spirit of sonship. Now we can cry out to the Father, "Abba, Father" and the God who created this world by saying, "Let there be" and there was, is the God whose ear we have.

As we go through life and there are things that make us afraid and worried, uncertain and anxious, God says, "Come to me. *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*" (Philippians 4:6). And then right after that, doesn't it go into, "*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:7). There is his promise to us—call out to God, the Father, and he will answer us in the best possible way and his answer will bring us peace and the freedom from fear.

It's kind of interesting, isn't it, that you and I can cry out, "Abba, Father" even though by all rights we are enemies of God by our nature. We can cry out "Abba, Father" because Jesus had to go through not being able to call God "Father". When he was on the cross in the middle of the darkness, he cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mark 15:34), and because he endured that lovingly and willingly for us, we can cry out, "Abba, Father". That means a world of difference in our daily lives. As we face

difficulties in relationships, as we face difficulties in our work, as we face difficulties financially or with our health, we can cry out to God, the God who loved us enough to die for us, and we have the promise that he will answer us in the best possible way. Can you think of anyone in this world who would not want that? But it is yours because God has acted.

God acted in the suffering of his Son, as we just said. He went through, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mark 15:34). This is the content of what we call the "Good News"—the Gospel—that Jesus suffered in our place. He suffered in our place to be perfect—perfectly facing every temptation, perfectly facing everything where you and I fall short, perfectly loving, perfectly encouraging, perfectly showing mercy, perfectly using every gift that God gave him to accomplish his goal, which is our salvation. That is why now we can hear what Isaiah said in our first reading—that this coal that is taken from the altar and touches Isaiah's lips because he is terrified because he knows he is a sinner—that coal really is the Gospel—the "Good News" that Jesus did it all perfectly in our place and then died as our substitute. That Gospel makes us clean so that we can stand before our God. When our God says, "I want you to serve me with the gifts I have given you," we can say boldly and confidently, "Here am I. Send me!" Because we have suffered with Christ and we know that we will share in his glory, so while we are here in time, we want to serve him—not because we have to, but because we want to love the one who loved us first! That is what our God has told us. Jesus himself said the Son of man came into the world not to condemn it but to save the world. That is what he came here for.

This makes every difference in the world. This enables you and me to go in our daily lives and live without paralyzing fear. Sure we will be afraid at times. Sure we will worry at times, but when we do we can say, "Lord, forgive my unbelief and strengthen my faith." As we get into the Word and Sacraments, he does that. Then we can face all these things with the confidence that if we live to the potential of what God has given us, we will amaze others.

Everyone in this world wants what you and I have. They want confidence. They want peace. They want this freedom from fear of everything around us. You and I have it! And you know what? If we give it away, we don't lose any of it. We are heirs of God, but the inheritance isn't divided up equally among each of us. We all receive the full inheritance. That is why as Christians who fearlessly follow the Triune God, we also fearlessly point other people to the Triune God so that they might know the blessings that are there for them. They are there. It is just up to us to point people to Christ, because the Spirit will do the rest of the work.