**Romans 8:14-17** May 30, 2021

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Trinity Sunday

*Romans 8:14Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHILD OF GOD?**

What does it mean to be a “Martin”? Or a Smith? Or a Rodriguez? It’s a question we maybe never ask ourselves, and it’s probably just as well. We just live it. We just do it. If you are like me (and here I am thinking more of my siblings than my children), you probably grew up thinking of more of how *different* you were from your brothers, sisters and others rather than how similar you were. Yet every family has its own way of doing things.

You noticed it first when you were a kid and spent the night at a friend’s house. That family did some things differently. You felt a little jealous of one friend and his family’s later bedtimes. But then there was another friend who was a farmer. Even the adults went to bed before your bedtime! You noticed the difference at meal times. Did they eat together? At a table or in front of the TV? Did they pray before their meals or not? Or maybe even before *and* after their meals? There were a hundred differences you noticed in their families.

What does it mean to be a member of your family?

I ask because there is a family we belong to and our reading today describes some of the hallmarks of that family. We sort of take it for granted, but outsiders looking in don’t know what to make of our family. We Christians are called children of God, but if someone asked us what it means to be a child of God, to explain what makes God’s family different, we’d really have to stop and think about it.

This reading explains quite a bit of what it means to be members of God’s family. I am going to start by mostly looking at what it is not.

**1.** One idea that people often have about being a Christian is it’s sort of like being a slave. We can understand how an outsider might think that. We give money, serious money, to the work of God. They might part with a charitable gift now and then, but a percentage of income, year after year? To them, being a Christian is mostly about the rules. And the rules are mostly about what you are not supposed to do. A Christian usually doesn’t have the chance to go into a full blown discussion of sin and salvation, Law and Gospel. He/She just says, “I don’t do that stuff.” And so, many people think of the Christian family as this group of people with arbitrary rules against three-quarters of the fun that is to be had. Surely, being a child of God’s family must be slavery. But *you* know that being a Christian is not about being a slave.

**2.** And it isn’t about fear either. Many think that Christians do what they do because they live under this cloud of fear of God’s judgment. Unfortunately, this was how much of Christianity did live for centuries. It’s why Martin Luther was so excited when he read his Bible and found the news of a Savior who had completely paid for all his sins, once and for all. He had never heard that from the pulpit or even from the priest in the confessional. He was astounded to hear of God’s great love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. He had to tell others. But the church of the day was built on the foundation of fear and uncertainty: “You really can’t be sure whether God is happy with you” they said. “He probably isn’t, so you’d better slave away in fear, and hope that maybe God won’t throw you into hell.” Now fear of God’s anger does have a place for the unrepentant sinner, but not in those who are God’s children. What parent wants children to fear him or her?

The thought that the family of God is characterized by slave-like obedience, or dog-like fear is cast aside in verse 15 where we are told, ***“You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of Sonship,”*** or as the old King James Version translated it better, ***“[You] have received the Spirit of adoption.”*** Adoption: when someone goes through countless hours of visitations and interviews, thousands or tens of thousands of dollars of fees, time in court, time on the road, time filling out endless paperwork, sometimes waiting years, just so they can look at you and say, “My Son, My Daughter,” that must be – now I have never been adopted, so I really don’t know – but that must be a tremendous affirmation, to know that somebody did all that just so you could be called their child. Wow! That’s what we have!

We children of God, who live in the family of God, we really can’t understand why people think it must be fearful slavery to be a Christian. The Holy Spirit has lit a spiritual fire in our hearts. He has convinced us of the truth of God the Father’s adoption through Jesus Christ. We relish the words of verse 15, ***“You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.”***

**3.** Well, if being a Christian isn’t about fear or slavery, then it must be about freedom and getting to do whatever you want, right?

Well, it isn’t exactly that either, and that’s not how family’s work either. Verse 14, still focusing on the Holy Spirit, says, ***“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”*** Or, to answer the question of what it means to be a child of God, let me reverse that sentence, ***“Those who are sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.”***

In the Christian family, we are led by the Holy Spirit.

As Christians we believe that we are born in sin, as enemies of God. Whether through Baptism or through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit brought us into a right relationship with God, through faith. Then after creating faith, the Holy Spirit also creates a new will in us. The Holy Spirit continues to strengthen and inform and build up the new will through the Word of God and Holy Communion. And so the question that God’s children, the members of God’s family, are always asking isn’t “What do I want?” but, “What does my heavenly Father want?” We don’t do so out of fear or a sense of slavery, but because the Holy Spirit syncs our will to God’s will.

Of course, that is not the full picture. And if we had read more of Romans chapter 8, we would have seen that. While the Spirit lives in us, we the sinful nature still resides in us, urging me to do what *I* want to do, not God. But God has given his Holy Spirit so that ***“Those who are sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.”***

The result in the family of God is people who curb their appetites, who don’t do some of the things that their sinful nature wants to do. You bite your tongue, not out of a calculation of whether it will come back to haunt you in the future or not, but simply because you know that the Spirit of God is telling you to restrain and refrain. We help others, not because we want them to help us when it comes to our time, but just because God wants us to help others, even to love our enemies, whether they will pay it forward or not. We don’t do things out of self-interest, but because of love for God. That is the Holy Spirit’s leading.

And so while God’s people can be a lot of fun and loving and joyful, there is often still a sense of restraint because by the Holy Spirit, we are always trying to rein in that sinful nature which is trying to break out.

**4.** Here’s another thing about what it means to be a child of God. But this one is in the positive.

Some of you deal with security clearances. There are levels of security clearance like Confidential and Top Secret, and many more that you know better than I. Well, what kind of security clearance would it take to walk into the Oval Office unannounced? And yet, there are some who need no clearance to do so: the children of the president. I have no idea what the White House is really like, but I know that presidents, whatever their politics might be, are human too, and they love their children. Such is how our God would have us approach him: not according to stringent protocol and security clearance, but as ones who have been born again to walk into his presence at any moment. That’s why our Savior when he told us how to pray to our God didn’t tell us, “This is how you should pray, ‘O Most High, Great and Powerful God…’” but he said, *“This is how you should pray, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven…’”* (Mt 6:9).

We turn to God the Father in every need, praying; as it says here, crying out to him. We rely on his guidance, his blessing. We never stop thanking our heavenly Father, giving him credit. That’s another part of what it means to belong to the family of God.

Verse 15 of our reading speaks of what it means to belong to the family of God this way: ***“You received the Spirit of [adoption]. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”***

**5.** And belonging to the family of God isn’t a meritocracy either. Toward the end of our reading it says, ***“If we are children, then we are heirs.”*** You know what heirs are, right? The ones who get the inheritance. Heirs don’t work for an inheritance. They receive it simply because someone wanted to grant it, and nothing else. The workings of our spiritual inheritance were described in our Gospel reading: *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* Eternal life: That’s the inheritance. The only qualification is *“whoever believes in his one and only Son.”* It has nothing to do with the amount of money in the offering plate; whether you decided to be a pastor or not; whether you have belonged to a church 50 years or five months. We all have the same share in the family inheritance.

**6.** Finally, one more thing about belonging to the family of God. Some might expect that in the family of God there will be some sort of diplomatic immunity. Well, this is the one disappointing thing about it all, sort of, ***“We share in [Christ’s] sufferings.”*** Jesus told his disciples that as he had suffered in this world, so would they, so will we. But listen to the rest of that verse, ***“We share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*** People in the family of God have this far-off look in their eyes, not in a bad way, but like those pioneers in the covered wagons. Their focus is on something other people cannot see. Through the eyes of Jesus’ own disciples, we have seen Jesus risen from the dead, glorious and ascended into heaven, and have been promised that that glory shall also be ours. So while people in God’s family feel the same pains and sorrows that other people in this world feel, and some additional ones too, we know of a glory that far outweighs it all.

So that’s what it means to belong to the family of God. Not slave-like fear, nor getting whatever I want, but being led by the Holy Spirit to live according to our heavenly Father’s wishes, confident of the Father’s approval and acceptance because Jesus did the work to save me now and for eternity.

You know, this is Trinity Sunday. Something came up a few weeks ago in our Sunday morning Bible study. Some people, not in our church, but out there some people say that the word Trinity is never found in the Bible, therefore it can’t be true. First of all, that’s not logical. And, it doesn’t match what we just heard from Romans 8:14-17, does it? We heard of the Holy Spirit, who calls us to faith and leads us in God’s will. We heard of the Father to whom we open our hearts in prayer, and whose plan our salvation is. We heard of Jesus, Son of God, who took on flesh, became our brother, did the work of saving us and has promised us glory with him. Yet the Bible never speaks of, or even hints at, three gods, but One God. And yet somehow there this distinction: not one person but three.

No, the word Trinity isn’t in the Bible. But the word explains what today’s one little excerpt of the Bible, and many others, describe, as we shall confess in the Athanasian Creed in just a minute. One God, three persons, whose plan it was to adopt us into his family. Enjoy your family as a child of God! Amen.