

“We Are Children of God”

Have you read the little description of Lent at the beginning of the worship folder this season? It highlights a few aspects of our observance that you might not otherwise notice. For example, when we speak about these Sundays, they aren't Sundays *of* Lent, but they are Sundays *in* Lent. When we speak of Lent being 40 days long, that doesn't count the Sundays. Even though we've said goodbye to singing “Alleluia,” we never leave behind the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. As much as we focus on repentance and the fact that it is necessary in our lives, our Sunday services remain islands of refreshment, or little Easters.

And maybe no Sunday in Lent is quite so clear about that as this one, one that has constantly held before us the concept of life from death. We heard about the young man whom God raised to life through his prophet Elisha. We heard about Lazarus who spent four days in the tomb before Jesus called to him to come out alive. Especially as we hear Jesus speak about himself as the resurrection and the life, we can't help but anticipate the joys of Easter that we will celebrate now in just two weeks.

And our lesson from Romans 8, that we will focus on a bit more closely in our sermon today connects these life from death accounts to you and to me. These several verses are so rich in meaning that we couldn't possibly exhaust all of it in a single sermon, but we find the truth applied to us in this way: we are children of God. We are children of God through the work of his Holy Spirit, and we are children of God with eternal results.

In these verses, Paul continues a thought from the previous section of his letter to the Romans about the Holy Spirit living in us. He continues to describe how that fact has a significant effect on our lives. That same power that was at work in raising Jesus from the dead is at work in us. The Bible consistently describes our coming to faith as going from death to life. Our sinful nature has been put to death. Through the Holy Spirit's call, we have been released from any obligation to our sinful nature. The misdeeds of our bodies have been put to death. Those **“who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”**

It can be easy for us to overlook how significant this really is. At the time of our births, that is by nature, there was nothing more to us than our sinful natures. We were totally set against God. We opposed his will. We were ignorant of him and all of the spiritual truths that he would share with us. And even his Word was foolishness to us until he stepped in, until he changed our hearts and drowned the sinful nature in us. For many, and maybe even most of us, that happened first when we were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. God works through this blessed sacrament to call to faith and to adopt us as his children. The same Apostle Paul writes to the Galatians: **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”** (Galatians 3:27). Totally unearned, totally unasked, we were adopted into God's own family! Another apostle, John, says it this way: **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”** (1 John 3:1).

Back to our verses from Romans, we read: **“For 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.’”** What part of our life hasn't been touched by this transformation? We no longer need to live in fear of anything! Not death, not hardship, not pain, not suffering or loss or sorrow. We need live in fear no longer even of the devil himself. Instead, we call God our very own Father. And he is our perfect father. It doesn't matter whether we identify so well with this illustration. It doesn't matter whether our earthly fathers have lived up to their God-given responsibility to love and care for us. God our Father loves us perfectly and has all power to help and care for us.

And one reason that we need to keep on coming back to this fact, the fact that we are God's children, is that we don't always live as children ought to. Our sinful natures rear their ugly heads again. We fall into our own pet temptations. We allow our desires to drive our lives rather than what God desires. If left to ourselves, we would wander away from our Father, and we would wander away to our own destruction.

But God, our faithful Father, calls us back. He assures us that his only-begotten Son, our brother, died to take away our sins and has freed us to live for him. As children of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live according to the Spirit. We cry out in faith and in confidence to our *Abba*, our Father. We are God's own children!

And being God's children has amazing eternal results. Children are heirs. They receive an inheritance. And the inheritance that God's children receive is eternal glory. Our connection to Christ by faith makes us co-heirs along with him of the glory that he has earned. We will live forever with him!

But there is still one word of warning and caution. We will share in his glory, but we may also share in his sufferings. Being a Christian does not mean that suddenly everything will always go our way. It doesn't mean that our lives will always be easy. It doesn't mean that we will be free from pain and sorrow and heartache. In fact, in many cases it means the exact opposite. It means that we will face ridicule. It means that we will stand out from the crowd around us. It means that we may have to suffer patiently and endure any number of hardships. This was the very message Paul had preached on his missionary journeys: **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God"** (Acts 14:22).

You see, it would be so easy for us to give up in the face of hardship. It would be so tempting to say, "Christianity hasn't made a difference in my life. It hasn't made things better for me. Maybe I don't need it. Maybe I am better off following the crowd. Maybe I am better off without Christ and without his expectations for me." And maybe, just maybe there are some ways in which we could escape some hardships in this life by giving up on being a Christian and living a Christian life.

But that view is too narrow by far. It focuses only on the here and the now. It forgets that we are meant for eternity. It forgets that we have something in store that will so far overshadow any troubles in this life that it isn't even worth comparing to them. Eternal life in heaven is such a prize, is such a gift, is such an amazing reality that it dwarfs and eclipses anything that we could possibly face in this life. That's what led Paul to write, **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."** Or in another place he writes, **"Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all"** (2 Corinthians 4:17).

That is the wider view. That is looking at this life from an eternal perspective. The gift that God has given us, the inheritance that we have in store alongside our Savior is so much more than we can even imagine or comprehend. It is so wonderful, so amazing, so incredible, that nothing that we experience in this life could even come close. Anything that we might face in this life is absolutely worth it if eternal life is waiting for us at the end. And it is.

That is guaranteed by the one who through his prophet raised a young boy who had died. It is guaranteed by the one who called Lazarus out of his tomb after four days there. It is guaranteed by the Spirit through whose power Jesus himself rose from the dead, who now lives in us and testifies that we are God's children. We will live with him...forever.

The text: Romans 8:11–19 (NIV84)

¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

¹² Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.

¹³ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For 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.” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now 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.

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.