

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and from the Holy Spirit.

This morning our focus is the lesson from Romans, chapter 8. It is a truly powerful message for us. Even the closing two verses take your breath away. "¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Thinking about the idea that The Spirit - the Holy Spirit - informs you and me that we are children of God almost makes a person dizzy. The Holy Spirit Himself ... bears witness with us. Paul wrote this by inspiration. It wasn't his opinion. It wasn't his guess. God is telling you and me to listen to communication of the Spirit within.

We Lutherans are leery of that sort of communication. It's who we are. There's good reason for caution - a good reason that's been around for a long time. If you look at the 22nd chapter of 1st Kings you'll see a report about a batch of so-called prophets who counseled evil. They were listening to and following the wrong voice. When Martin Luther met with Zwingli at the Marburg Colloquy they were not able to agree about the Real Presence of the Lord's body and blood in the communion elements. Finally Luther said "yours is a different spirit." Luther meant that Zwingli based his arguments on reason rather than the testimony of Scripture.

It's a part of our heritage, then, to question that inner calling, that seeming "spirit" and feeling within. The one that the world likes. We simply don't trust it. All too often that "spirit" is only being led by our sinful flesh or by the devil himself.

However, in today's text Paul talks about a testimony of the Holy Spirit with your spirit and my spirit. He talks about a testimony of the Holy Spirit with the regenerated spirit of the Christian. How do we know what spirit this is? How can we trust it? What does the Holy Spirit want to say to us? Through Paul our Heavenly Father tells us.

It is essential to remember that when we listen to the Spirit, He gives us IDENTITY. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

The Holy Spirit wants us to have an unwavering conviction that we are God's children.

It's kind of like Peter - when Jesus talked to him after the resurrection. Three times - Jesus - God Himself - asked Peter "do you love Me?" In the midst of this questioning Peter held fast to what the spirit within told him. He said to Jesus, "Lord, you know all things. You KNOW that I love you." Peter knew who he was, weaknesses and all and KNEW - Holy Spirit KNEW - that he loved Jesus and Jesus loved him.

How do you really know if you're a Christian? Is it just a feeling? It's more than that - although feelings are definitely involved. Paul explains what this testimony involves in vs. 13-15. There are two things that testify to you that you are God's children. Romans 8:13-14 *¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons^[f] of God.*

The first testimony is reflected in your lifestyle. This isn't about whether you live modestly or whether you are an effervescent and outgoing personality. This is not about a good decision instead of a bad decision. This is about the foundation, the focus, from which the rest of life proceeds.

For instance, a child who lives day after day knowingly ignoring his parents' wishes for him to clean his room, is living according to his own lazy flesh. It's pretty simple to expand that example so that it includes any number of life choices folks make. When the choices become regular - when they become a pattern - a pattern of greed or dishonesty or lust or vanity - the choices are then a lifestyle. It doesn't matter what a person claims to believe if that person's on-going actions give a completely different story. The Holy Spirit will not live with such unrepentant ongoing behavior.

This is a difficult testimony to hear. Every day we - even as Spirit driven Christians - still sin. Last week we heard Paul's testimony - "the evil that I would not do is what I do." Temptation - planted and watered and tended by the Father of Lies - is the battle scene.

It is an ongoing battle for each and every one of us. The sad truth, the human tragedy truth, is that we often lose these battles. Just because we lose these

battles on a regular basis, doesn't mean that we don't have the Holy Spirit. We are all much weaker than we would prefer being. Coming away from a lost battle, bruised and bleeding from sin, The Holy Spirit still stands with us and we are rescued by God's Grace.

There is another sign of our Faith status. It's more than winning some battles. It's more than the spirit-healing from a lost battle. It is in the attitude that the Holy Spirit gives you. "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.'"

You know you have the Holy Spirit if you aren't a slave to fear - if you regard God as your Father. If you do not fear standing before God on Judgment Day because you have been washed clean in the blood of Jesus - you know you have the Holy Spirit. If the law of God doesn't send you running from God then you know you have the Holy Spirit. When you confidently say, "I am a child of God," then you know you have the Holy Spirit.

Such confidence does not come from reliance on feelings. Feelings come and go. This confidence also doesn't come from reliance on lifestyles. The only place that this confidence comes from is the Gospel. The Gospel of Jesus Christ gives the promise from God the Holy Spirit Himself. This promise is repeated again and again throughout the first eight chapters of Romans.

Just listen to the first four verses of this chapter. Romans 8:1-4. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.^[a] ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you^[b] free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin,^[c] he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The Gospel states that there is NO condemnation for sinners like us, because our sinfulness ... our natural selves ... were already condemned through Christ on the cross. When we believe ... when we already FAITH-KNOW ... that Jesus paid our price, we can stand before God without fear. The Holy Spirit testifies to you in these verses that you already paid the price - when Christ paid the price and said,

"it is finished." The Holy Spirit says that this is yours through FAITH in Christ - not by works.

There are two things we can expect as heirs of God. Notice that in being heirs of God, Paul also calls us co-heirs with Christ. With faith in Christ, God identifies us with Christ - The Lord's blood is put on our souls. His righteousness is put on our account. We are indeed co-heirs - joined not only at the hip - but at the heart and the soul.

However, this means that not only does God identify us as Christ, but so does the world. If the world looks at us as Christ, then that means that the world will also want us to suffer.

Suffering was the only way that Jesus could be IDENTIFIED with US. He couldn't do this only by living on our planet and eating our food and walking in our shoes. He had to go through the same temptations we had. He had to live under the same laws that He gave. But ultimately, He had to take this a step further. In order to be identified with SINNERS, Jesus had to become us on the cross.

On the cross God no longer looked at Jesus as His beloved Son. On the cross Jesus no longer called Him Father - He called Him - "My God" - who had forsaken Him. At that moment in time - Jesus had the worst connection with the world - the connection of sin and hell. It required SUFFERING for Jesus to shoulder our sin.

When we live and witness our connection with Christ, when we witness salvation ONLY in His Name, it angers people. When we tell the Hindus and the Muslims and the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons that they aren't going to heaven without Jesus, it enrages them.

When we tell the work righteous crowd that filthy sinners are declared holy free of charge, they think it is outrageous. It makes them feel angry. The simple fact is that the world hates our way. Even though we witness the truth, even though we witness the Love of God in Jesus, Paul says "don't expect anything but suffering."

At the same time, Paul also shares the true perspective with us. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Several years ago Anna Nicole Smith - a Playboy model - married a guy about fifty years older than she was. The guy just happened to be a multimillionaire. When he died, the family contested the will, which stated that she should receive millions of dollars. The family didn't think she deserved such an inheritance, because she only married him for his money. The courts decided in the family's favor, declaring her to be a gold digger.

Our status as children of God is different. God is the beautiful and rich King, and we were the ugly and filthy nothings, beggars. God had nothing to gain by adopting us. He was not hoodwinked into adopting us. In His mercy He decided to make us His children, His family.

You and I are children of God, even though we don't deserve it. You and I are heirs to the eternal glory, even though we haven't earned it. Jesus has earned our salvation. He promises each one of us "you are a child - through FAITH."

Praise be to our Lord Jesus. Thanks be to our Heavenly Father. Thanks be to the Holy Spirit Who brought us home with faith.

Amen.