

Romans 8:14-17
Holy Trinity Sunday
Finding Freedom in Forgiveness
Remember Who You Are in the Triune God!

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
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¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to 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.

In the name of our Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. This morning after church, we’ll be switching back to our Summer Bible Study schedule. We’ll pick up where we left off two summers ago with our *Very Important Chapters of the Bible* study. Everyone is invited to join us for those Bible study hours no matter how old you are, and hopefully they’ll be a great benefit for our whole family here at Shepherd of the Hills.

There’s an awesome chapter of Scripture on that list which I’m not sure we’ll quite get to this summer, but fortunately we get to look at a part of it today, it’s Roman chapter 8. Right now, as we go through chapters in the Old Testament, most of them focus on a Bible character like Joseph in the chapter of Genesis that we’ll look at later this morning.

What makes Romans 8 so special is that there are two main characters: our Triune God and YOU! The chapter starts off by saying, **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (Rm 8:1) and finishes with comforting truth that nothing, **neither death nor life, angels nor demons... nor anything else in all creation, is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Rm 8:38-39).

No condemnation. No separation. That’s the amazing news for God’s children. And that is who you are according to Romans 8:14-17: **For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 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.**

There are two different ways that I want to break down our lesson this morning. First, because today is our celebration of the Holy Trinity, let’s look at the roles that each person of the Trinity has in bringing us into God’s family. Then, let’s look at everything God promises to share with us as His children.

One of the reasons this is such a neat passage is that we have all three persons of the Trinity listed personally in just these few short verses. First, we see the work of the Holy Spirit. We’re told, **those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.** (In the first half of the Church Year, with Christmas and Lent and Easter and Ascension Day, we look closely at the life of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity. But beginning last Sunday with Pentecost and moving forward today into the second half of the Church Year, our focus shifts to the work of the Holy Spirit. Specifically, His work in the hearts and lives of Christians.)

One of the ways we can describe the work the Holy Spirit does is “leading.” We need to be led because we all start in a place that isn’t so healthy for us. Figuratively speaking, it’s as though we’re in

a room filled with motivational posters that have messages like “You can do it!” “The power is inside you” or “Be the very best that You can be!” While they may be popular, those messages of the world aren’t true. So the Holy Spirit leads us into a room that’s walled in with a giant mirror that reaches all the way around us. The mirror is God’s law, and as we stare at ourselves in it we start to realize, “I can’t do it. I haven’t done it. There’s no power in me to be good, just to be selfish. The very best that I can be can’t ever be enough for God.”

The Holy Spirit uses the law to lead us to see ourselves, He needs us to see who we are, to find how hopelessly we’ve failed to live up to God’s expectations. He needs us to see our sin so that He can take us from in front of that mirror and lead us into another room. This next room has in the center of its main wall, a beautiful window. That window is the gospel, the good news about Jesus. As we peer into that window, we get to see our God and His great love for us. We see His Son Jesus who came to live a perfect life as our substitute and who took our place on the cross and died for our sins. We see God reaching out to us with arms stretched out like a father welcoming home a long absent child.

The Holy Spirit leads us to that message of the gospel to show us the freedom that we have in forgiveness. And what He accomplish through that? Paul writes, **The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.** The word “again” in that verse is very important. It drives home what we were before the Holy Spirit began leading us. We *were* slaves. We *were* trapped in fear of death and the consequences of our sins. And there was nothing *we* could do about it! But, the Holy Spirit has led us out of slavery into freedom. He has led us from fear and uncertainty of slavery to the comfort and safety of family.

Make no mistake about it, God wants you to be His child. No one has ever been adopted on accident it’s too complicated of a procedure to happen by mistake. The same is true when it comes to God. Your adoption into His family was the result of a painstaking process carried out over thousands of years. That’s what makes it so incredible! The Holy Spirit leads us to see and to know how great God’s love for us is and how much He has accomplished over the years so that you may be set free from slavery to sin and to Satan and the world and welcomed into His family.

And so, we can cry out, **Abba, Father!** There are two words right next to each other in that verse, *Abba* which is Aramaic for *father* and *pater* which is Greek for *father*. I think the point the Apostle Paul is trying to make is that we can address God the Father, the first person of the Trinity as though He is our own Father. Translate that into whatever language you speak. Use whichever term of endearment you prefer: papa, dad, father, whatever it may be. That’s the level of comfort you may have in calling out to God because of the message that He has sent His Holy Spirit to lead us to.

That message is the one about Jesus, the second person in the Trinity. Just as God the Father sends the Holy Spirit to lead us to Jesus, He sent Jesus to lead us to Him. I was reminded of that by one of the translations I was looking at earlier this week. It took the passage we were just looking at—**Abba, Father!**—and translated it as **Father, my Father** (Good News Translation). I don’t know if it was the translator’s intent, but that brought to mind for me the words Jesus spoke from the cross, **God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** (Mt 27:46).

It was on the cross that God treated His Son as though He were not His Son. God despised Jesus and forsook Him because He had taken the guilt of our sins on Himself. Jesus did that so that we, His fallen creatures, could be treated as children of God. You and I have been adopted as God’s sons and daughters because we have been made righteousness by the cleansing blood of Jesus. He took away our sins and gave us His holiness. In short, because Jesus was driven to cry out on the cross, **God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** you and I are now privileged to cry out, “Father, my Father, thank You for not forsaking me!”

God the Father has made us His children through the work of Jesus Christ whom He has led us to by the work of His Holy Spirit. He makes us His children so that we can share in what belongs to Him.

What does that include? Verse 17 tells us that we are co-heirs or joint-heirs with Jesus. If the Father is *our* Father, then it stands to reason that His Son is also our brother and that means we are in line to receive the same inheritance that Jesus has. Think about how incredible that is. Everything the risen, triumphant, ascended Christ has received from His Father belongs also to us. Forgiveness, salvation, and life in the fullest. No condemnation. No separation. Victory over the devil, over the sinful world, over our own sinful flesh. Our enjoyment of that inheritance starts right here today, but the fullness of the joys of our inheritance we know will come when the suffering and struggles of this world are replaced by the glories of heaven.

The phrase that talks about suffering in this passage really connects both to the phrases immediately before and immediately after it. We share in Jesus' sufferings *because* we are co-heirs with Him—because we are His brothers and sisters—and *so that* we can also share in His glory.

To be able to call God our Father, to be able to call Jesus His Messiah our brother and our friend, and to be able to count as our own the inheritance God has given into His hands, what greater privilege could there possibly be? That's the privilege we find in the freedom of forgiveness—freedom from our slavery to sin and the freedom of elevation to the status of children of God.

“But if I'm truly free, then I should never have to suffer, right? I should be able to choose not to suffer, shouldn't I?” Maybe you've wondered those thoughts before. Freedom can be a tricky concept. It's even more complicated here in a country where we have a cultural idea of what “freedom” is alongside God's definition of “freedom” in the Bible. The American ideal of “freedom” is, in essence, the power or the right to act, speak, or think as you want without hindrance or restraint. Granted, our nation also realizes that there are certain rights which everyone is entitled to and we cannot use our freedom in a way that would infringe on someone else's rights or liberties.

Biblical freedom, on the other hand, isn't about making whatever choices and decisions you want to make, it is about being who you were always meant to be and living the life you were intended to live. The Triune God's plan for you since the moment He created this world, was that He would be your Father and you would be His children so that you would be able to share in all of His glory. The slavery to which our human race has fallen is the notion that we can be our own gods, that we can find happiness and peace and glory for ourselves by choosing whatever seems best for us. But thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit has led us to see, I'm not my own man, and neither are you—your own man or your own woman. I am a child of God. You are sons and daughters of God. We do not serve ourselves alone; we serve our heavenly Father, the one who sets us free and adopts us into His family!

We will suffer, for a time, as we serve God in this world, just Jesus Himself suffered as He carried out His Father's will. But even in the midst of sharing in His suffering, the Holy Spirit is there, reminding us that we also share in His glorious inheritance, testifying to our hearts that we are God's children. He who has created us will continue to protect us. He who has given us new life through faith will strengthen and keep us in that faith. He who has adopted us into His family by bearing our sins Himself and dying for us on a cross, will bring us home with Him to enjoy the relationship He has won for us.

The Almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has forgiven all your sins.
May God strengthen you to live in your baptismal grace all the days of your life.
Peace be with you. Amen.