

May 30, 2021  
Romans 8:12-17

Holy Trinity  
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

## **“No Guest Rooms in God’s House”**

“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.”

The “Little Room” was the smallest of the three bedrooms in our family home. It was used mostly for storage, but it was also the guest room when we had the occasional overnight visitor. The room was never used by a member of our household since none of us were by definition a “guest” in the home where we were members of the family. A “guest room,” by definition, is only used by those who are not members of the household, for those with no permanent status in the family.

- “To be a member of a family confers upon a person certain privileges and responsibilities toward other members of that family that are among the closest of human ties. To be a member of a family means one share with others a common life shared in mutual interdependence.” – Paul Achtemeier.

There is a place for a guest room when we are welcoming persons from outside our household; but there is no place for a “guest room” in the household of God into which we were incorporated through our baptism into “*God in three persons, blessed Trinity.*” As we celebrate this Sunday of the Holy Trinity and God’s revelation as God the Father, God and Son, and God the Holy Spirit, we also celebrate our adoption as children of God when we were baptized in the name of our Triune God and made members of the Church which is the Body of Christ, the household of God’s family in which all are welcome. As God so loved the world that God sent his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life, so is the household of God a place where all are welcome and all belong as children of our Heavenly Father, as sisters and brothers in Christ who know that they belong in the place where God chooses to dwell amid God’s beloved children.

In today’s second lesson from the letter to the Romans, Paul offers a celebratory description of present Christian experience, rooted in God’s past action in Jesus Christ, assured of God’s future action for Christ’s people and for the whole world, and sustained in the present by the Holy Spirit. Paul’s understanding of the inheritance to which God’s children are promised as “*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*” (8:17) is rooted in his background in the Hebrew Scriptures in which

“inheritance” was the land promised to Abraham and his family, and promised again to Israel after the exile:

- “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.” – Genesis 15:7.
- “But whoever takes refuge in me shall possess the land and inherit my holy mountain.” – Isaiah 57:13.
- “I will lead people upon you – my people Israel – and they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance. No longer shall you bereave them of children.” – Ezekiel 36:12.

Paul’s understanding of inheritance has developed so that “*the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*” (Romans 4:13). The glory that has been promised to God’s children in Christ is precisely that they are to receive this inheritance for which we are forever indebted to God. We are in debt to God because, being God’s children, we are also God’s heirs. We are fellow heirs with Christ since, sharing his sufferings, we also share his glory.

- “God’s law is good, but ultimately it does not have the power to free people from the grip of sin and transform them into ones who live out God’s righteousness. Only Christ does this, taking on sin to the point of death in order to defeat sin and give righteousness to those who trust him. The Spirit who raised Christ from the dead is the same Spirit who dwells in believers, assuring them that they are heirs to God’s promises in Abraham and members of God’s family.” – Jennifer V. Pietz.

Paul reminds his readers that “*we are debtors*” (8:12), but our death is not to the “flesh,” Paul’s term for humanity in a state of rebellion against God. Paul warns against continuing to live “according to the flesh,” to see the death-bound inclinations of the present body for what they are and to put them to death here and now; these are the “works of the flesh” that the Apostle enumerates in his letter to the Galatians:

- “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for they are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am

warning you, as I warned you before: those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” – Galatians 5:17-21.

Those who by the Spirit have “*put to death the deeds of the body*” (8:13) receive the status of divine adoption, for God’s Spirit makes us members of God’s family. To be led by God’s Spirit means to have changed our future from death to life, to have changed our relationship with God from rebellion to obedience, and to have changed our status from rebellious enemy to beloved child. The image of being “led by the Spirit” is taken from the Exodus wanderings of Israel, where God leads God’s people by the pillar of cloud and fire:

- “The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” – Exodus 13:21-22.
- “In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all night long with a fiery light.” – Psalm 78:14.

The Holy Spirit now does for God’s people that which the tabernacle presence did in the wilderness, assuring them of divine adoption and leading them toward their inheritance. The idea of Christians as God’s sons and daughters is rooted in this same Exodus narrative (“*Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son.*” – Exodus 4:22). The God who sends his Son now sends the Spirit of the Son in order to adopt as sons and daughters all those in whom the Spirit dwells.

- “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.” – Galatians 4:4-7.

Paul emphasizes the liberation from fear that is the result of our being adopted as children of God: “*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.*” Those who have been born anew to a living hope through their adoption as God’s beloved children know that “*there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love*” (1 John 4:18). It is our adoption as God’s children that enables us to cry out in intimacy to God as “*Abba! Father!*”

the same words spoken by Jesus when he cried out to God before facing his crucifixion (*“Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”* – Mark 14:36). God is known in an intimate, familial relationship for which this Aramaic term, used by adults as well as children, is entirely appropriate. *“It is a way, above all, of making Jesus’ prayers one’s own, and hence sharing in the sonship of Jesus.”* (N.T. Wright). It is a way of expressing from the heart something at the very center of the gospel: that in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, the covenant faithfulness of God has been received for the salvation of all who believed; *“for in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’”* (1:17). The result of this work of the Spirit is that our human spirit is assured that we are children of God; *“the Spirit’s very own self comes alongside our human spirit to bear witness that we are God’s children.”* (Wright). If we are God’s children, we are also God’s heirs. If Christ is to be Lord of the world, those who are God’s children will share in his inheritance, bringing redemption to the world that so longs for it. It is the inheritance that is *“imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Peter 1:4-5). But there is a cost involved with being *“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”*; it means that *“we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”* (8:17). To be a member of God’s family promises life and joy in the future, but it also promises suffering and rejection by the world of flesh we have rejected in being led by the Spirit. It is a reminder of Jesus’ warning to his disciples that *“if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”* (Mark 8:34-35). The road to the inheritance, the path to glory, lies along the road of suffering; *“in this you rejoice, even if for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed”* (1 Peter 1:6-7).

- *“The transformation wrought by God’s Spirit is such that one becomes a foreigner to the culture to which one once belonged. Yet that is a small price to pay for the privilege of belonging to God’s very own family.”* – Achtemeier. Those who by calling God *“Abba! Father!”* enter God’s family are transformed in such a way that their former world is no longer their home; *“those who with firm faith and hope are confident that they are children of God are children of God, for no one can have such a confidence except through the Holy Spirit”* (Martin Luther).

Our baptism in the name of the triune God means that we are no longer guests within the household of God, but we are members of the family, beloved children for whom our Saviour suffered and died so that we might be blessed with the gifts of “forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation” that God bestows on all of God’s children. Baptism is God’s free gift in which we are *“reborn children of God and made members of the Church which is the body of Christ”* (ELW Holy Baptism). We are therefore *“no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God”* (Ephesians 2:19). For all that God has given us in liberating us from “sin, death, and the power of the devil” and adopting us as sons and daughters *“we are debtors,”* but the debt we owe is not one that requires monetary or material sacrifice but living in accordance with what God desires for God’s children: *“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”* (Micah 6:8). It means that *“for all this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.”* (Small Catechism). It means that our lives as God’s children are devoted to giving thanks to God in both word and deed; for *“no gifts have we to offer for all you love imparts, but what you most would treasure – our humble, thankful hearts”* (ELW Hymn 681). It means living each day in the fullness of our identity as a child of God and a member of the household of faith that is the family of God: *“it follows that God’s children should be called and also be gentle, merciful, chaste, just, truthful, guileless, friendly, peaceful, and kindly disposed toward all, even toward our enemies. For the name of God, in which we were baptized, works all this in us.”* (Luther).

No one in our household used the Little Room because we were not guests but members of the family; but that also meant that we were not treated like guests but expected to hold up our responsibilities and obligations to each other in the family. It meant that we needed to care for each other, put the needs of each other ahead of our own desires, do our chores and fulfill our commitments to the other members of the family. Being a member of a family involves both privilege and responsibility; as members of God’s family, we are called to affirm the promises we made in Holy Baptism that we declared before the household of God’s children on the day of our Confirmation and which we continue to confirm as we live every day in this community of the children of the Heavenly Father: *“to live among God’s faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth”* (ELW Affirmation of Baptism). Being a member of the family of God, the household of faith means enjoying the love and fellowship we experience in this beloved

community while also being faithful to our commitments to God and to one another as *“the body of Christ and individually members of it”* (1 Corinthians 12:27).

- “We belong to him because we are in him. This is why the Scriptures call us the Body of Christ. Christian community means community through and in Jesus Christ. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for all eternity.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*.

There are not guestrooms in the household of God, for all who have been baptized in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are reborn children of God and are members of the family of God which is the Body of Christ. It is the place where we belong, the place where we are always welcome; it is the assembly of all believers among whom God’s Word is proclaimed and God’s love is embodied; it is a community that bears each other’s burdens, that both rejoices and weeps together, that fulfills Jesus’ commandment to *“love one another as I have loved you.”* (John 15:12). It is the place where we dwell in the presence of the Lord even as we look forward to the day when our Lord will return and take us to that home that our Saviour has prepared for us *“so that where I am there you may be also”* (John 14:3), knowing that as *“surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”* (Psalm 23). We are not guests, but beloved children of God; as we dwell in God’s loving presence in this household faith, we live in that assurance that *“neither life nor death shall ever from the Lord his children sever,”* that nothing can separate God’s children from the love of God that is our inheritance in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.