

INI - SDG

5th Sunday in Lent

April 10, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Text: Romans 8:11-19 ***But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors -- not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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 as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." 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 joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.***

Theme: WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD

- Adopted by the Spirit
- Led by the Spirit
- To be raised through the Spirit

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus, who have been called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified with the whole Christian Church on earth, by the working of the Holy Spirit,

Did you find our Old Testament lesson as captivating as I did? (Ezekiel 37:1-14) It is like a scene right out of a hit Hollywood movie! The LORD takes Ezekiel and sets him down in a valley where it looks like World War III has been fought. The floor of the valley is full of dead men's bones. Bones that had been picked clean by predators and left to bake in the hot Mid-Eastern sun. But then, at the word of the LORD, those dry bones are covered with muscle and skin. And when the LORD commands it, life enters those once dry bone. They then rise to their feet and stand as a great army.

What a sight that must have been! How amazing it must have been to see those once dead and lifeless collection of bones, rise to life at the LORD's command, and stand as a mighty army ready to do the LORD's bidding. Don't you wish you could have seen what Ezekiel saw in that valley?

Yet, if you have ever witnessed a baptism, you have seen something just as amazing! It may not have looked as spectacular with your eyes as what you imagine Ezekiel to have seen, but the LORD did the very thing He showed Ezekiel. Here in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, God sent His Holy Spirit and created life in someone who was spiritually lifeless. He raised that person to spiritual life, made him or her part of His mighty army, ready to do His bidding.

This life which the Holy Spirit gives is emphasized throughout our text from Romans 8.

Let us consider what an amazing thing it is, that the Holy Spirit has taken our once dry and spiritually lifeless bones, and made us children of God. Let us hear how we were adopted by the Spirit, how we are led by the Spirit, and how we will be raised through the Spirit. May the same Holy Spirit who has called us to faith through His Word ever strengthen us through the same.

ADOPTED BY THE SPIRIT

Adoption is a pretty amazing act of love, isn't it? A man and a woman decide that they want to bring a child who is not theirs into their family. Those parents will feed that child, clothe that child, and provide shelter and protection for that child. They will provide a home for that orphan. But the greatest thing they share with that child is love. They will love that child, as if he or she was their own flesh and blood, even though it wasn't their child by nature. What an amazing gift to give a child that otherwise wouldn't have it - a home, parents, and love!

Isn't this exactly what God has done for us? We were not naturally His children. In fact, we were His enemies by nature. He told us what His will was and we wanted to do the exact opposite. He said, "Thou shalt love Me above everything else," we said, "We'll love ourselves first and if there is love left over, maybe we'll share some with you." By nature, man views God as an angry and demanding Judge, rather than a gracious and merciful Father.

Yet God changed all that. Paul writes in verse 15, "**For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'**" God sent His Holy Spirit to breath spiritual life into these dry bones and adopt us as His children. Think of that! God brought you into His family and made you one of your children!

The result of being adopted by the Holy Spirit, is that we no longer fear God as an angry Judge. Instead we see Him as Jesus would have us see Him, as our loving, heavenly Father. We speak to Him the same way in which His Son Jesus spoke to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Abba, Father." "Abba" is an Aramaic word like our word, "Daddy." It is a very tender, loving word. It implies a close, loving paternal relationship. And that is the relationship we have with the Father by the Holy Spirit. When He brought us to faith in Jesus, He brought us into a close, loving relationship with God the Father.

But how can we know if we have been adopted into God's family? Paul continues on in verse 16, "**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.**" Like a witness in a courtroom who has to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so too the Holy Spirit is testifying of the truth with our spirit. When the Holy Spirit brought us to faith in Jesus, He created a new man of faith in us. This new man of faith, along with the Holy Spirit bears witness to us that we are God's children. Do you call God your Abba, Father? When you read Scripture, is God speaking to you about your sin and about Jesus as your Savior? That is the testimony of the Holy Spirit with your spirit that you have been adopted by the Spirit and made a child of God!

LED BY THE SPIRIT

Who here remembers the McDonald's jingle from the 1970's, "You deserve a break today?" They wanted you to think of McDonald's as a break from the hard work of preparing a

meal or a break from the normal daily routine. You deserve it! This was not just a marketing scheme for McDonald's, it is also a marketing scheme used by the sinful flesh. The sinful flesh tries to convince us that we've been pretty good and so we deserve a break from denying the desires of our flesh. Go ahead, have a couple extra drinks. Go ahead, look at that dirty website or movie. You deserve a break today.

Though we have been adopted as children of the heavenly Father, we still have a sinful flesh to contend with. Our flesh wants to please itself rather than please God. Our flesh wants to follow the world rather than the Word. Our Old Adam, will want to serve itself and join in sins of adultery, theft, fornication, false witness, covetousness, and the like. Maybe not always in an open way, but to lust after the things of the flesh in the heart. The Apostle Paul spoke of the same thing a chapter earlier when he wrote of himself, **"For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."** (Rom 7:19) As an adopted child he knew what God's will was and wanted to do that, but his sinful flesh prevented him from doing so.

Because we have the same sinful flesh we need to hear this stern warning from Paul in verses 12 and 13, **"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die."** As children of God (fellow brethren with Paul), we are debtors - but not to the flesh. We don't owe the flesh anything. We are not obligated to serve it and obey it. The only fruit the flesh can produce is death! Spiritual death and, eventually, eternal death.

Paul continues, **"but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."** The difference could not be more striking between those dry bones on the valley floor that we used to be, and the vibrant, full of life, children of God that we are now. Then we were led by the flesh to serve the flesh. Now we are led by the Spirit of God to serve God. Led by the Holy Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body. Rather than letting the flesh rule us, by the Spirit we are empowered to mortify the sinful flesh.

How are we led by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body? Well, do you remember how it was that muscle and skin were formed on those dry bones? The LORD said to Ezekiel, **"Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!"** (Ez 37:4) And do you remember how those lifeless bodies were filled with breath and rose to their feet to make an exceedingly great army, ready to do the LORD's bidding? **"Prophecy to the breath, prophecy son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the LORD God...'"** (Ez 37:9) It was only by the word of the LORD that those dry bones were able to do anything.

The Spirit works through the same means in us. He leads us always and only through His Word. Through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament He leads us to put to death the deeds of the body and gives us life. Through the Word the Spirit leads us to crucify and drown our old Adam through daily contrition and repentance. Through the Word the Spirit leads our new man of faith to daily come forth and arise. We are children of God who are led by the Spirit.

RAISED THROUGH THE SPIRIT

This struggle between our old man of sin and our new man of faith is one that will continue on until we die. But there is a great day that is coming. A day that is so great, that all of creation is eagerly awaiting it. The great day when all the sons of God will finally be

revealed. That great day, will be the last day, when the Spirit will raise us to life.

Verse 11, ***“But if the Spirit of Him (the Father) who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He (the Father) will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*** The same Holy Spirit who came to you through the Water and Word of baptism; the same Holy Spirit who adopted you, and made you a child of God; the same Holy Spirit who testifies that you are a child of God; the same Holy Spirit who dwells in you will also raise to life your physically dead body on the Last Day.

Paul speaks of the glory that awaits the children of God at the resurrection on the Last Day. Verse 17, ***“and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”*** As the adopted children of God, we are allowed to share in everything that was Jesus’. We are joint heirs with Him and will be glorified together with Him. That is what Jesus gave us. And what did we give Jesus? Our sin. Our sorrow. Our hell. All of which He willingly took on Himself when He suffered and died in our place. What love! What grace!

But until that day, there is a cross we must bear. It is the cross of discipleship. Jesus told us to expect suffering in this life for following Him. He said, ***“A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”*** (Jn 15:20) If you have a chance later, you can read of just such an example in our bulletin. Missionary Koenig tells of how Pastor Parandaman in India, was once a Hindu. But the Holy Spirit breathed life into his dry bones and adopted him as a child of God by bringing him to faith in Jesus. The result was suffering. His family ostracized him and still does today. We should expect the same from the world, from friends, and even from family as we follow Jesus and His Word.

But don’t focus on the cross-bearing or suffering. Instead, Paul says, ***“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*** None of that suffering we endure in this life can even BEGIN to compare with the glory that is to come. You see where Paul’s focus is? Where ours needs to be - the glory of the life of the world to come. The glory that Jesus earned for us, which makes our present sufferings seem so insignificant. The glory that will be revealed when we see Jesus face to face. The glory when these corruptible bodies put on incorruption and these mortal bodies put on incorruption (1 Cor 15:53). We will be raised to this life through the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead and who dwells in us.

We were once those dry bones scattered about the valley of the shadow of death. We were spiritually lifeless and without hope. But thanks be to God that He sent His life giving Spirit to us. Through the water and Word of holy Baptism and through the preaching of the Gospel, God sent His Holy Spirit into our hearts. His Spirit adopted us as God’s children. Through the same Means of Grace the Spirit leads us to repent of our sins and put on our new man of faith. And creation joins us in eagerly waiting for the great day when the sons of God will be revealed in the glory that Jesus has won for us. May the Spirit who called us, gathered us, and enlightened us ever keep us steadfast unto the end. Amen.