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St. John's Lutheran Church – Kimball, NE
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10A)
July 13, 2014
Text: Romans 8:12–17

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). That’s a verse of Scripture you should know by heart for it describes your eternal standing before God the Father. As you go about fulfilling your various callings and vocations, remember that you are not condemned. Doubts, sins, failures, the world, your consciences, hell and all their evil horde may assault you relentlessly. But you are not condemned. For you are in Christ Jesus through baptismal faith.

Your sinful flesh, however, does not recognize and submit to the Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s why we Christians struggle so fiercely with sin. We belong to Jesus yet our flesh wants to be its own god. Listen to Romans 8:9–11, the verses just before today’s appointed epistle reading,

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

According to God’s Word, you live not in the power of the flesh but under the direction of the Holy Spirit given to you through Jesus in baptism. And the unchanging promise is that even as the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, you too receive resurrection life in your mortal bodies. In other words, you are people of life, now, and most completely and fully in the resurrection of your flesh on the Last Day.

You are not condemned, saints of God. Not only that, you are filled with the Holy Spirit and are blessed recipients of Christ’s resurrection life. That’s who you are in God’s sight. Wow! What glorious, good news. But you might be tempted to ask, “Then please, tell me pastor, why on earth do I continue to sin so easily? Why is walking in the flesh so natural whereas walking in the Spirit is so, well, unnatural?”

That, in part, is what Paul is trying to answer in vs. 12–17. The practical, daily living application of not being condemned, of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and being recipients of Christ’s resurrection life begins in vs. 12–13, “So then, – the “then” connects the previous verses to what he’s about to say – brothers, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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.”

We need to hear Paul’s warning. Living according to the passions of the sinful flesh brings death. Don’t miss the force of the Bible’s warning. Through Christ, you have been saved from death and given eternal life. But to surrender to the passions and ways of the flesh will enslave you again to death. As God’s people, we are called rather to put to death the deeds of the body by the Holy Spirit through daily contrition and repentance; contrition means true godly sorrow and remorse over the sin in our lives, repentance means turning from sin, denying it, daily crucifying it, and then pursuing righteousness under Christ’s Gospel.

We don’t hear too much these days about self-denial. Our whole way of living, our economy and much of our government, is established upon indulging our fleshly appetites. These aren’t always wrong or sinful. We must eat and sleep and clothe ourselves and so forth. Along with these normal needs of the body come sinful passions. Eating becomes gluttony, sleep and relaxation become sloth, indolence, and laziness, clothing becomes a means to vanity and prideful exhibitions, sex becomes fornication or worse, sodomy, self-confidence becomes haughtiness, natural relationships, family and friends, become means to accomplish self-serving ends...well, you get the point. All good gifts become corrupted by our sinful nature.

The deeds of the body lead to death, spiritual death immediately and physical death eventually. That is why Paul urges us to put them to death (vs. 13) before they put us to death. The only means given to us to accomplish this monumental task is “by the Spirit” (vs. 13). It is the Holy Spirit, working through God’s Word and Sacraments, who does this for us. The Holy Spirit leads us to repentance and faith.

Martin Luther describes this work of the Spirit beautifully in his explanation to the 2nd petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come.” Luther writes, “God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.” Living a godly life, the very opposite of “the deeds of the body”, is possibly only through the on-going presence and pervasive guidance of the Holy Spirit given to us in baptism,

the reading and preaching of God's Word, and constantly confirmed in the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood. The Holy Spirit works the death of sin in our lives by means of the Holy Scriptures. Conversely, the Holy Spirit brings forth all virtue – faith, hope, love, prudence, justice, temperance, courage – through Word and Sacrament. All other acts of Christian piety – prayer, fasting, charitable giving, self-denial, works of love and service to friend and neighbor – are intended to serve the primacy of God's Word in our lives. Where God's Word is richly present, there the Holy Spirit is doing His redemptive work.

Thus far we have considered what we might call the negative side of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives: the putting to death the deeds of the body through repentance and faith guided by God's Word. But there is also a positive work, the proper work, if you will of the Holy Spirit. He makes us into sons of God through adoption and heirs of God's eternal kingdom. Listen again to vs. 14–17,

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 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.

God in His grace was not content to simply declare you not condemned (Rom. 8:1), a glorious as that is, He created us, redeemed us, and sanctifies us so that we can be His own dear sons. Serving sin is slavery. Baptismal life in the Holy Spirit is adoption into God's family. Paul says we Christians cry out to God through the Spirit using the most familiar and intimate words possible, “Abba Father.” The closest comparison would be children calling their father “daddy.”

Think about the intimacy afforded us mortal human beings! That we are given the right and privilege, in spite of all our sins and failures – past, present, or future, to call upon God not only as Creator, Sovereign Lord, Almighty God, but as Father. Those words, Abba, Father, created within us by the Holy Spirit, pierce through the darkest gloom and reach to the very ears of God. Through this adoptive grace we claim to be a child of God on account of Jesus; I am beloved of the Father because of the Beloved Son and the Blessed Holy Spirit (*adapted from Martin Luther*).

As if this weren't enough – complete and full adoption into God's holy family – Paul declares we are also made heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (vs. 17). Once

and for all we need to banish all such ideas about barely making it to heaven or about filling the lowliest place in God's kingdom! No dear saints. You are sons of God and heirs with Christ! All that Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection – the prestige of victory over sin, the glorification of your flesh and blood bodies in the resurrection, exaltation over all creation, the eternal praise of the Father – all that belongs to Jesus is now your inheritance.

In this life, there may in fact be suffering for Jesus (vs. 17b). But even that turns to our glorification with Jesus. You see, Jesus' story, His life, His victory, His eternal destiny are now your story, life, victory, and destiny. This is what it means to be Christian. Not only are you not condemned, you are filled with the Holy Spirit, made sons of the Father and heirs of divine glory with Jesus, the eternal Son.

Thanks be to God for His exceedingly abundant grace and love.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.