

Today is Pentecost- it comes from a Greek word meaning fiftieth day. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit is center stage, rushing as a wind through the early church and inflaming the hearts of Jesus' believers. Pentecost is a day of new creation- all things transformed and made new by the Word and Breath of the living God. It is a shame that the Holy Spirit gets put off on the Pentecostals and is often viewed as an afterthought for many Christians. Remember the two baptisms- the one John the Baptist did with water and the other one that really matters- Christ's baptism- the one with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11)?! It's hard for us in modern times to really comprehend the awe of Pentecost, isn't it? Some of us just say, "Oh, it's the birthday of the church," and it is, but it's also so much more- mysterious and complicated and beautiful. "In the last days," God declares, "I will pour out my Spirit upon *all flesh*" (Acts 2:17 quoting Joel 2:28-32). *All flesh*. Not just some people. That's the Acts 2 story quoting the prophet Joel. But today we're going to read from Paul's letter to the Romans concerning the relationship between believers and the Spirit, who is a powerful, animating force. Paul is writing to those who are "set on the flesh"- lives lived in a self-centered way, which Paul would call a way of death. "The alternative is a life in which the Spirit dwells in us. That does not mean something mystical or pious, but a life received from God's generosity and lived back to God in gratitude" (Walter Bruggemann, *Collected Sermons*, Vol. 2). Before turning to God's word for us today, let us first pray. **PRAY**. Listen to a word from God. **READ Romans 8:14-17**.

Diana Butler Bass, a church historian and theologian, writes in her blog about getting in trouble this week for a tweet she wrote. The tweet

concerned a resolution being brought to its' upcoming national meeting. "At issue is the question of *open communion (or open table)*, whether the meal of sharing bread and wine is for only baptized Christians or for anyone wishing to participate. A group of theologians wrote a letter on the question that included this line: "Holy Eucharist is therefore not intended for 'all people' without exception, but is rather for 'God's people.'" And that's when Diana hastily- and passionately- posted this tweet: All people ARE God's people. Start your theology there. Start every theology there for God's sake. For the sake of humanity. For the sake of the planet." Here at Triune, we practice an open table because we do believe, like Diana tweeted, that all people are God's people. Yes, baptism is one of our sacraments, and we take it very seriously; however, who are we to say that someone won't encounter the living Christ at the table? Who are we to limit the work of the Holy Spirit? There is no distinction between "the great unwashed of humanity versus the special people of our inner circle. The people who aren't invited and those of us who are. Outsiders and insiders. The unsaved, the saved" (Butler-Bass). We're all heirs of God but many times we forget that, don't we? We live as if this wasn't true.

A friend recently told me she heard someone speak at a business conference recently who said, "Peace and love are good but in America today fear and hate sell more product." Fear is real. There's something about fear that we're all so gravitated towards. Maybe we don't want to give up on fear because we'd rather be afraid than to face the unknown? A friend and colleague of mine who is in recovery commented that the

three things that get her are pride, ego and fear. She used to ask herself in her addiction- in her enslavement to alcohol, "What will happen if I don't drink?" She feared the answer. She didn't know at the time how to be free and to truly receive God's love for her. Scott, a staff member here at Triune, introduced me to him. This man is serving Triune with the PTI- Parole Training Intervention program. I'm not going to use his name, as I didn't get permission to do so. After the introduction, he began to share some of his story with me. He had just been released from jail where he had been for a while, having to leave his wife and children behind. While in jail, he said, "I was grateful to have the time away to reflect with no big distractions (though I missed my family). What God showed me in a real clear way was who and whose I am- a child of God; an heir with an inheritance!" He went on to say that he had been confused for 20+ years of his life about who he was. He was told who he should be, and he had a really low view of himself. That is until God's Spirit reminded him while not in a pleasant place- where freedoms are taken away- that he, too, was a child of God. He, too, was redeemed as joint heirs with Jesus Christ! While he was talking with me, I was thinking of the Chance the Rapper song, *Child of God*, especially these lines: "This world would make you second guess your first mind. Remember when it was your first day, the first time- it couldn't have come at a worst place or worst time and you remember that lil voice with that rehearsed line-just repeatin' do your thing, child. Do your thing. Just do your thing, child. Do your thing. Just do your thing, child. Child of God."

That is what Paul is saying to the church in Rome and to each of us. Do your thing, Child. Remember who and whose you are! Do not be afraid! Because dying to the flesh means dying to a spirit of slavery. "It means dying to fear and those forces which hold power over us. To be a child of God is to be an heir, not to be a slave but a member of the household of God, free from fear and free from the power of death" (Crystal Hall, workingpreacher.org). Notice that Paul says that God's Spirit witnesses **with** our spirit. The emphasis being on the relationship between God and God's people. God's Spirit is intimately involved with each of us. God's Spirit reminds us who we are when we're fearful. When we're suffering. When we think we're 'not enough.' God's Spirit reminds us that God made us in Their image. We're beloved children of God and there's nothing we can do about it! "By Roman law, adopted children, unlike slaves, were full heirs of their father's estate. The inheritance Paul refers to is the glory, or eternal life in God's presence, that God intended for humanity and that Christ has already received" (*CEB Study Bible*). As children of God we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit inspires us to pray to God, just as Jesus did. Who do you know who has had a Pentecost experience? A time when they realized because of the gift of the Holy Spirit who and whose they were and live differently because of their inheritance. "Her name was Breezy- a street name she was given because of the speed with which she moved from man to man working as a prostitute on the streets and down the back alleys. Twenty three years of prostitution and drugs had left their mark on Breezy. Her face was scarred, her body battered, and her spirit dead. It happened in a broom closet in a homeless shelter in California. The

broom closet was Breezy's own personal tomb. She huddled within its cramped walls for three days and three nights. She had arrived, exhausted and beaten, to the shelter. It was full. So she crept into the closet where, as time passed, she was forgotten by the stressed out shelter staff. Breezy had given birth three days earlier. Her tiny daughter was born- shuddering and jaundiced from drugs. She was taken away by the hospital emergency staff to be given medical attention and placed for adoption. Breezy staggered off into the night- to the shelter and the broom closet. On the third day she woke- hungry, and devastated by the memory of the baby she had birthed and lost. In the cramped darkness of the closet Breezy sobbed in shame and horror. Broken and helpless, for the first times in many year, she began to pray. In between her sobs she asked for forgiveness from God- and from her baby. And something happened. Maybe it was like a stone being rolled away. Maybe it was like a dense darkness being pierced by a brilliant light. Maybe it was a Pentecostal experience- a breaking through of energy and fire into a dead soul. But something happened. And it was so powerful that Breezy crept out of the broom closet- determined to find her way home to Chicago and to live a new and different life. And she did. She sought counseling and healing and entered a program of recovery. It was a long and painful process- letting go, forever, of 23 years of violence, drugs, and prostitution. The shelter staff decided to hold some sort of funeral for Breezy's old life and in that simple and symbolic ritual, Brenda was born. Claiming her birth name, Brenda came into the dawn of new life. It was to be a life of the Spirit. It was to be a life led by God where Brenda would become a healer of those

broken and battered- as she had once been. She was lost but now was found. And no one, ever again, could deprive her of the inner dignity and joy of knowing who she is- the daughter of God and sister of Jesus” (Edwina Gateley, journeywithjesus.net).

How comforting to know that we’re gifted with the Holy Spirit as children of God. Theologian Karl Barth calls this passage the “song of the redeemed.” “Children and heirs of God. That, incredibly, is what we are. There never was and never will be another legacy like this one. Moths and rust do not corrupt it, thieves do not break through and steal. It cannot be lost in the stock market or burned in the night or cancelled out by inflation. This legacy gives us hope when all else fails. It guarantees us a future when we cannot imagine how there can be anything left in life for us. Paul says the Holy Spirit is the guarantor of our inheritance. When a Christian cries out ‘Father!’ to God, however inarticulate the prayer, however sinful the petitioner, however desperate the cry, it is the Spirit speaking for them, guaranteeing that their hope is not in vain, that God hears them, that God has adopted them as God’s heir, that God has prepared an inheritance for them that nothing can destroy. Jesus Christ himself is the fore-runner, the first-fruits; we are fellow heirs with him in his resurrection and will share his glory” (Fleming Rutledge, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*).

And, as we know, along with the comfort also comes the challenge. We also have to recognize that along with the inheritance comes the suffering with Christ so that we may be glorified with him (v. 17). “We

have a two-part inheritance. One part is glory. The other part is suffering. Fellow heirs with Christ, we will be raised with him in glory. But we will also suffer and die with him on the cross. There is nothing more certain in the Christian life. If we think we can receive the inheritance without pain, without struggle, without sacrifice, we have misunderstood the whole gospel” (Rutledge).

Friends, if you hear nothing else today, hear this. There is life and hope outside of fear and the shadows! We are children of God; heirs- we all have a voice and an inheritance that cannot ever be taken away from us. Richard Rohr puts it this way, “You all are temples of the Holy Spirit, equally, objectively, and forever! The only difference is the degree that we know it, draw upon it, and consciously believe it. God does not give God’s Spirit to those of us who are worthy, because none of us are worthy (Daily Meditations, 6.5.22). God’s Spirit is a gift, just as grace is a gift from the Almighty. Because of our inheritance we can be more free, more confident, more secure. Don’t you want to behave like a fellow-heir to Christ, not like a fearful, guilt-ridden person afraid of what may happen tomorrow- held prisoner by “buts” and “ifs,” poor of spirit...dead to life (Rutledge)? We don’t have to be like that; we’re heirs of God! Do not live in fear. Because God is on the move! Can’t you hear this song of the redeemed? Look up child, listen for God’s word of grace and embrace this Redemption Song for it is yours. God’s Spirit is the power that animates this movement from life, through death, into new life. So let us *recognize and call upon the Holy Spirit, a gift God has already given us!* Thanks be to God! Amen.