

### “Heirs with Christ”

Today on the church calendar it is Trinity Sunday, the day we celebrate a doctrine that none of us is capable of truly understanding. “God in three persons, blessed Trinity . . .” I believe it, but do I understand it? Not really.

Pastor Keith Krell tells of spending time with his toddler son Joshua several years ago. While Krell was sitting in his recliner, Joshua went over to his toy bag and grabbed a tennis ball and brought it to him. Joshua then went back to the bag and got a small nerf ball and returned to his father with it as well. Finally, Joshua went and picked up a mini basketball and did the same thing. Then he tried to take all three of the balls out of his father’s lap and hold them, but no matter how hard he tried, he just couldn’t hold all three. His tiny hands were not big enough to handle all three balls at one time. “The Trinity is just like that,” says Pastor Krell, “three-in-one is just more than our small, finite minds can grasp.”

That is true. And as much as none of us can really explain the Doctrine of the Trinity, it is a central aspect of Christian Theology. God comes to us in three Persons. God is the Creator of all that lives and moves and has its being. God came to us in the person to Jesus Christ to redeem us of our sins. And God is present with us in the form of the Holy Spirit to comfort us, to encourage us, and to give us strength. It is that third part of God’s nature, the Holy Spirit, that is important in our text today from Romans. And particularly how God’s Spirit delivers us from one of life’s most bothersome problems, the problem of fear.

Paul writes, beginning with the fifteenth verse from today’s lesson in Romans, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption . . . And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children . . .” I never really meditated on these words from Paul before: “you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear.” But it’s really something to think about. Everyone is afraid of something. In fact if you are not afraid of some things and have no worries then that’s when we need to be concerned.

Norman Vincent Peale writes about walking down the street, when he saw his friend George approaching. It was evident from George's downtrodden look that he was deeply concerned about something. Dr. Peale asked him, "How are you, George?" While that was meant to be a rhetorical question, George took him very seriously and for fifteen minutes enlightened him on how bad he felt. Finally Dr. Peale said to him, "George, I'm sorry to see you in such a depressed state. How did you get this way?" "It's my problems," George said. "Problems - nothing but problems. I'm fed up with problems. If you could get me rid of all my problems, I would contribute \$5,000 to your favorite charity." That got Peale's attention. He said, "Yesterday I went to a place where thousands of

people reside. As far as I could determine, not one of them has any problems. Would you like to go there?" "When can we leave?" answered George. "That sounds like my kind of place." "If that's the case, George, I'll be happy to take you tomorrow to Woodlawn Cemetery because the only people I know who don't have any problems are dead." That's true. To be alive is to have problems. Some problems are big. Some are small. Some of us have health problems, work problems, relationship problems, money problems. We're not alone.

Each Christmas and at Easter, choirs all over this country perform Handel's immortal "Messiah." This work has endured and thrilled audiences for almost 250 years. The next time you hear it try to remember that five years before composing the Messiah at the age of 52, Handel suffered a stroke. Isn't it comforting to know that people can often come back from strokes, cancer, heart attacks, the loss of a limb, etc. and live noble, productive lives?

Some of us have money problems. It's no disgrace. When he was young and impoverished, Pablo Picasso kept warm by burning his own paintings. Mozart was so poor that he was unable to buy wood to heat the shabby room in which he lived. He sat with hands wrapped in woolen socks to keep them warm, while he composed the music that was to make him great. He died of consumption at the age of 35, his vitality lowered by constant hunger, cold, and lack of proper nourishment. Just six people followed the cheap coffin in the Funeral Procession, and even they turned back because it started to rain. His pitiful funeral cost exactly \$3.10.

We have health problems, money problems, family problems. The only people who have no problems, are the people lying out there in our cemetery. And too often, our problems cause us Fear. But the Apostle Paul tell us, For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear." We defeat fear when we acknowledge our fear and seek to confront it. Our faith is Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to confront it.

Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., in her book *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal*, tells about her uncle who was a hero in World War II. He was a physician who was following the troops one day. Acting on false information, the soldiers moved forward believing the ridge on which they were advancing had been cleared of enemy fire. As they moved out of cover, the hidden enemy opened fire and within seconds the field was covered with wounded and dying men. The enemy continued to blanket the area with live fire. No one could stand upright. It was more than twelve hours before air reinforcements could cripple the enemy position. Her uncle, crawling on his belly with supplies strapped to his back, placed tourniquets, stopped bleeding, took messages sometimes written on the back of worn photographs, and gave last rites, during all that time. When reinforcements came and the enemy was pulled back it was clear that he had saved dozens of lives. He was decorated for this action and his picture was on the front page the *New York Daily Mirror*.

Ms. Remen was seven years old when all this happened and she was surprised that her uncle was so brave. Her uncle was short, balding, and wore glasses. He even had a little potbelly. Always a shy man, he seemed uncomfortable with all the fuss, and uneasy as

neighbor after neighbor came by to shake his hand. Eventually young Rachel found her moment. Climbing into his lap, she told him how brave she thought he was and that she was sure he was never afraid of anything. Smiling, he told her that this was far from the case, that he had never been more frightened than ever before in his life. Severely disappointed, she blurted out, "But why did they give you a medal then?" Gently he explained to her that anyone who wasn't afraid in situations like war was a fool and they don't give medals to people for being fools. Being brave does not mean being unafraid. It means being afraid, and doing it anyway.

Her uncle was very wise. We never solve our fears by running away from them. If you're afraid of speaking up in a group, if you're afraid of trusting your instincts, if you're afraid of taking a risk of any kind it won't help to be a slave to those fears. It's like being afraid of crossing a bridge, that fear won't go away by forever taking another path home. We deal with fear when we acknowledge and confront that fear.

That is where our faith is so important to us. We are not alone as we face up to our fears. God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is with us. Paul writes, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

It is so important that we know who we are. When she entered the church this morning Clara Geraldine Peters was just the child of her parents, now she is a child of God! We are God's children. We are brothers and sisters of Christ. We do not go into any situation alone. That is the practical implication of the holy Trinity. God created us. Christ saved us. The Holy Spirit is with us. That's why Paul could write that we have not received a spirit that makes us a slave of fear.

On a logical basis, why would anyone who truly believes in the resurrection of Christ fear anything? Death has been defeated. The worst that the world can throw at us, cannot destroy us. Christ is alive. Just as important, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is with us encouraging us, telling us that we matter to God, helping us confront every obstacle. The most complete victory that we can win over fear is to walk hand in hand with Christ guided by the Holy Spirit.

A story is told of a small boy who had to walk each evening past a dark, spooky house. Some adults sought to give him courage. One handed him a good luck charm to ward off the ghosts. Another had a light put on the dreaded corner. Still another said, "It is sinful to be afraid. Trust God and be brave!" The advice was well-meant, but not very helpful. Then someone said with compassion, "I know what it is to be afraid. I will walk with you past the house." He did nothing to remove the fear except to lift it from the child's shoulders and place it on his own.

That is what Christ wants to do for us. Trust him. For most of us, even those closest to us do not know our fears. But God knows. As you sit by the bedside of someone you love, you're not alone. God is there. When you're called to deal with the pressures of the workplace and you doubt your ability to cope, there is an Encourager there beside you who wants you to

know you matter. Walk with confidence. “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children and we have nothing to fear.” Amen