

Eighth Sunday after Trinity: August 7, 2022
“Abba, Father...”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Book of Romans has many well-known passages. The last two Sundays we have heard read the section concerning the baptismal reality and promises spoken in Romans 6. After our text this morning from Romans 8, we read another section of well-known words such as, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” And, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This is the promise that God has given to us, His children. Our text this morning bears some pause. There is a contest which involves the interrelationship between living/alive and dead/mortal. The ongoing struggle that is the Christian life is highlighted in this section. There is a tension in which we live.

It is true that baptized believers are no longer in the realm of the flesh in the sense of being subjected to its totalitarian control and domination. When that was the case, there was no struggle, but only slavery under the rule of sin and death. The reign of the Law is a more complicated proposition, since, in addition to original sin and the total depravity of fallen human nature, one also needs to consider the divine source and holy nature of the Law. The “inability” of the Law is because it was weakened through the flesh. Nevertheless, the Law too exercises lordship over all who are living in the realm of the flesh, and who, are unable to do what the Law demands.

On the other hand, those baptized into Christ now have peace with God and life in the Spirit on account of righteousness, but there the flesh still confronts those who have died to sin in Baptism and are now urgently fighting against it. Those who were put to death to the Law are no longer condemned by it, but continue to struggle imperfectly to live in conformity to the Law even while their mind, will, and inner being agree with and delight in the Law.

This tension can be hard to live with, and when it is relieved it means one of two things: either we have died and enjoy heavenly bliss awaiting the resurrection, or we have fallen into false doctrine. This is what the wolves in sheep’s clothing seek to do. They rob you of your eternal comfort by selling the sheep cheap, quick and easy hope. The kids seem to be free, until dad comes home.

As God's children, we dare not live after the flesh; rather, we must mortify the deeds of the body. We do not live after the flesh which means to serve sin, or to permit sin to rule over us. We do not remain under the bondage of sin and decay and death. We too hear the words spoken to Cain, "***Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.***"¹

Every Christian knows how difficult this task is. Of ourselves it is an impossible achievement. The natural out for the sinful nature takes a few different paths. It either seeks to change the definition of what is permissible with the body and life, or it seeks to play the victim card and deem God as an arbitrary, over-bearing abusive Father who seeks only my harm and despair meaning I have to find strength within myself to move out of the current situation or windup in hopeless despair.

The Christian knows this struggle, but has a better prayer. First spoken over you in baptism, you are given the words of the Holy Spirit through the Psalmist,

"I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

² ***My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.***

³ ***He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.***

⁴ ***Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.***

⁵ ***The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.***

⁶ ***The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.***

⁷ ***The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.***

⁸ ***The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.***"²

¹ Genesis 4:7

² Psalm 121:1-8

Through those blessed waters of Holy Baptism, God's own Spirit, the Holy Spirit has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified you. Brothers and sisters in Christ, "***As many who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to be back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, in whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'***"³

This is the cry of a child who depends upon his Father. This is the plea of a child filled with hope and trust. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is your prayer of a poor, miserable sinner regenerated and restored in the Blood of Christ, who realizing your own weakness throws yourself upon the mercy of God, imploring Him for everything you need, to mortify the deeds and passions of the body, to overcome sin and death, which is already yours in Christ.

What does this look like? This isn't just a grand platitude for you to piously think about where it stays in your hearts and minds like, "Oh, well isn't that special. What a great idea." This petition is the cry of a child every day to their Father. It is the cry of a toddler who incessantly pleads all day every day to His Father because the Father is the source of every joy and blessing not just in the future life to come, but in the here and now, moment by moment reality that is the Christian life.

When the Christian is being tempted by the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh to become indifferent to the Word of God, or careless in the use of God's Word, we cry, "Abba, Father." When we are tempted to neglect the preaching of God's Word, or worse, to despise it, to esteem it lightly or hold it as common words with no more weight than the words of a news anchor, a politician, a family member or even a friend, or when we are tempted to disregard its admonitions and its warnings and despise also its messenger, our cry rings out, "Abba, Father, help me to hold Your Word sacred. Help me to gladly hear and learn it. Graciously grant that nothing may cause me to neglect, disregard, or despise Your saving Word and Your Holy House. Teach me to pray: ***O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.***"⁴

³ Romans 8:14–15

⁴ Psalm 26:8

When we are tempted by the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh to forsake God and place our trust in money and goods, carnal enjoyments and the desires of the flesh, in things that rust destroys and thieves can steal, we pray, “Abba, Father, grant me strength to trust in You above all things. Let nothing separate me from You. Help me to pray: ***Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*** ²⁶ ***My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.***”⁵

When tempted to seek revenge, to reward evil with evil, we pray, “Abba, Father, grant that I may overcome evil with good. Do not let me be carried away by anger and hatred, enmity and revenge. Teach me to love and forgive and to cry to You with Stephen: ***Lord, do not hold this sin against them.***”⁶ Drive me to pray with the Psalmist: ***Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!*** ⁴ ***Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies!***”⁷

When we are tempted to sins of immorality and uncleanness, our cry is, “Abba, Father, help me to avoid and flee every form of indecency of heart and mind, body and actions. Grant me a clean heart and teach me to say with Joseph: ***How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?***”⁸

Abba, Father is the daily cry of God’s Children. It is the cry that starts at the baptismal font. The Old Adam is drowned and died and a new man daily emerges and arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. With all boldness and confidence, in all conditions, under all circumstances, the Child of God turns with a childlike faith and trusting heart to God the Father: “Abba, Father, receive my confession, wash me and make me whiter than snow. Feed me with Christ. Help me receive the Holy Sacrament of Your Son’s Body and Blood in faith in the blessed assurance of the forgiveness of all my sins. You have sent Your Son, the Good Shepherd who has given His life for us sheep. You have sent pastors to shepherd us with Your Word and feed us Your life-giving bread through Word and Sacrament.”

⁵ Psalm 73:25–26

⁶ Acts 7:60

⁷ Psalm 141:3–4

⁸ Genesis 39:9

Brothers and sisters consider what else flows from this font in our life together. Brides are led from the font through the company of the baptized to a man to whom they will be joined together by God. Their cry flows, “Abba, Father, bless this union. Help me remain true to my spouse in thought, word, and deed. As a husband, help me to love my wife the way Christ loves the Church. As a wife, help me to love my husband the way the Church loves Christ.”

What other rite, service, flows from the font? When a Christian stands at the death-bed seeking solace and comfort from above, “Abba, Father, help me to grieve with hope, not as others do who have no hope. Fill my saddened heart with the comfort of Your eternal Word. Bear my burden and give me yours, which you promised is light. Lift up my eyes to see the reality of your cross, your death, your burial, AND your resurrection. May I ever sing with the Psalmist:

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

⁵ *You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever. ⁹*

How can all of these prayers be possible? How can a Child of God do any of these things? Luther well-summarizes: I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and keeps me in the true faith.

⁹ Psalm 23:4–6

Thus the prayer of Abba, Father is one of thanksgiving. In the ongoing struggle of the Christian life, the wolves have their false clothes destroyed and their teeth are removed. They cannot devour God's children, He fights for you. He who gave You His Only Son has declared that nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit Himself bears witness that you are children of God. The Holy Spirit continually reminds you of that fact. While the world seeks to destroy the word Father and makes masculinity or fatherhood a dirty word, they do so in ignorance and without the love of God. The word Father is of utmost importance and its relational significance is for your eternal good. You need not fall back into fear. You can as a redeemed child of God, washed in the blood of the Lamb, cry "Abba, Father..."

And as you cry to God the Father may you remember from Luther, *"But in the midst of these terrors of the Law, thunderclaps of sin, tremors of death, and roarings of the devil, Paul says, the Holy Spirit begins to cry in our heart: 'Abba! Father!' And His cry vastly exceeds, and breaks through, the powerful and horrible cries of the Law, sin, death, and the devil. It penetrates the clouds and heaven, and it reaches all the way to the ears of God...This is indeed a very short word, but it includes everything. Not the lips, but the feelings are speaking here, as though one were to say: 'Even though I am surrounded by anxieties and seem to be deserted and banished from Thy presence, nevertheless I am a child of God on account of Christ; I am beloved on account of the Beloved.' Therefore the term 'Father,' when spoken meaningfully in the heart, is an eloquence that Demosthenes, Cicero, and the most eloquent men there have ever been in the world cannot attain."*¹⁰

May the Holy Spirit continually bear witness to you, fellow heirs of God with Christ leading you to cry, "Abba, Father!" Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

¹⁰ Luther, AE 26:381, 385

Prayer of the Church
Eighth Sunday after Trinity
7 August 2022

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. O God, You have purchased and obtained us as Your flock by the shedding of Your blood. Root out of us all sins and vice, all strife and disbelief, all error and heresy. Rebuke the erring, convert the unbelieving, bring the rebellious again to the unity of the Christian Church and show them the light of Your truth. Protect our shepherd from all danger of body and soul. Bless all pastors and those who assist in building up Your congregation, and make their labors fruitful. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, You have purchased and obtained us as Your flock by the shedding of Your blood. You have established marriage and sanctified the home to be a place of blessing and love. Give to parent and child the courage to love as You have loved us. Unite them in their common life by Your Spirit to know Jesus and serve Him. Bless the single with chastity, comfort the widowed, protect the orphan and defend the helpless. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, You have purchased and obtained us as Your flock by the shedding of Your blood. Fill all governing authorities with fear of You, and let their service foster and preserve peace. Have mercy on our people and country. Let our youth be brought up in discipline and in right knowledge of You, that they may recognize Your Law and the way of Your salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, You have purchased and obtained us as Your flock by the shedding of Your blood. We give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Barb, Helen, and Tim*, and those who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially, *Sophia, Sloane and Joe* grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, You have purchased and obtained us as Your flock by the shedding of Your blood. We give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Ken & Jan, Tim & Pam, and Rich & Barb* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

O God, You have purchased and obtained us as Your flock by the shedding of Your blood. In Your temple, we think on Your steadfast love. Hear us on behalf of all who need healing, strength and comfort [*especially Marvin, Ruth, Pam, Zoey, Dorothy, John, David, Merrill, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), and those we name in our hearts*]. Defend them from the attacks of the evil one, and cause them to join in Your praise. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, You have purchased and obtained us as Your flock by the shedding of Your blood. Give us a great hunger and thirst for the life-giving food of Your blessed Sacrament. Keep unbelief and impenitence far from those who come to Your table. Unite us in the fellowship of the pure teaching of the apostles and prophets, that we may give no offense and bring no division, but eat and drink in faith for the forgiveness of sins in the unity of a true confession. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You that You have brought us to the knowledge of Your Word. Graciously keep us steadfast in this knowledge unto death, that we may obtain eternal life. Send us pious pastors who will faithfully preach Your Word without offense or falsehood, and grant them long life. Defend us from all false teachings and frustrate those who pervert Your Word, who would come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves, that Your true Church may be established among us always and be defended and preserved from such false teachers; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**