

Pentecost Sunday
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA
Romans 8:14-17

- You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.
- It seems like there is a lot of fear going around these days
- And it seems like it is becoming ever more pervasive - to be afraid, to live in constant state of anxiety
 - Turn on the news or listen to some of the political candidates, read a health magazine or look at an economic forecast - and the message is the same - be afraid, be very afraid
 - Of course - on some level - we know that fear is the way pundits, politicians, and media outlets try to get our attention
 - "Are your curtains killing you? Tune in at 11."
 - "If that candidate wins - our whole way of life will be destroyed - the economy will collapse, the sky will fall, and we'll all be speaking chinese!"
- Some christians have even fallen into the trap of trying to use fear to bolster commitment and church attendance
 - Our numbers are down - our congregations are withering away - our values are under attack our traditional beliefs are beset on all sides - we need to circle the wagons, we need to band together, we need defenders of the faith
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- The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is fear.
- Fear betrays our lack of trust - our lack of assurance that God is in control - that our future is in God's hands - that our place with him is secure
- Fear of not having enough
 - leads us to hoard - to protect - to not freely give our time and resources - to love and care for those who are most in need -
- Fear of losing face - of social embarrassment - of maintaining status
 - prevents us from proclaiming - by word and example - the good news of God in Christ -
- Fear of the unknown - the stranger
 - keeps us from leaving our comfort zone - from seeking to serve Christ in all persons - from loving our neighbors as ourselves

- Paul's words to the Romans still speak powerfully to us today
- "You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption."
- God has sent the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to come along side us in times of anxiety and to remind us that we are his children - that we don't have to give into fear and anxiety.

- The Spirit you received is not a spirit of slavery - but a spirit of adoption
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- A spirit of adoption (or, more literally, a spirit of Sonship)
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- It is by the Spirit that you are incorporated as members of the body of Christ - united with the Son - to share his place in relation to the Father - adopted as children of God - such that we can call the Father - the Father our our Lord Jesus Christ - "Our Father"

- "When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God"
- In our gospel reading for today - we hear of the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son
 - Jesus assures his disciples, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me"
 - Whoever has seen me has seen the Father
 - The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works
- The Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of Christ - brings us into this intimate relationship - between the Father and the Son - by united us together with Christ - making us members of his body
 - such that we can say - that he dwells in us and we in him (in much the same way as he dwells in the Father and the Father in him)
 - It is the Spirit that makes this possible - because, as Jesus tells his disciples, he abides with you and he will be in you
- My friends - this is a profound mystery - a mystery that is not so much to be understood as it is to be lived - the mystery of the divine life - which we enter into in faith - which enters into us - shapes us, guides us, and assures us of our hope.
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- "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" Paul says
- And if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ
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- We will share with Christ the glory of God's everlasting kingdom -
- God loves us with the same love that he has for his Son, because of what he has done for us - we too are God's children now - because we are now united with Christ by the Holy Spirit
- Nothing can take that away - as we say in Baptism - you are sealed by the Holy Spirit - and marked as Christ's own forever
- And nothing can separate us from God's loving embrace- Paul says - "I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- We are in God's hands - our place is secure - nothing can take it away, nothing - not even death - can separate us from his love
- The gift of the Spirit assures us of this - and thus assures us - we have nothing to fear
- You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear - you have received a spirit of adoption - you are God's children now!
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- Today is Pentecost. Today we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Today we remember, as some people say - "the birthday of the church"
- Before Pentecost - the disciples were fearful and disorganized - unsure of what they should do - spending most of their time in hiding
- After Pentecost - and the gift of the Holy Spirit - they not only understood their mission - they began to carry it out - having the courage to come out of hiding, to leave their comfort zones - to openly and courageously proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of God in Christ - what was accomplished by his life, death, and resurrection
- They went out into the world, empowered by the Spirit - knowing themselves to be spiritually and sacramentally connected to the risen Christ, members of his body, the Church
- Today - our mission as the church remains the same as it was 2000 years ago - to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ, by prayers, our worship, proclaiming the Gospel, and promoting justice, peace and love.
- Today - in a world captivated by fear and anxiety - the task set before us is this - don't just come to church, *become* the church
- Become the people of God - led by the Spirit - from every race and nation - who go out boldly into the world - not in fear - but in faith - to love and serve the Lord - to proclaim the gospel - to serve the lowest and the least - and to show by our life and actions that indeed, the Lord is risen - we have been freed from captivity to sin, evil and death - and we need not give into fear. Amen