

Pentecost 5                      7/13/14  
Romans 8:12-17                10A

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.

Up and down, up and down, day after day. That was the fate of Sisyphus. He brought upon himself the relentless wrath of Zeus because he betrayed a secret of the “father of the gods” and his punishment was to roll a boulder to the top of a hill. Only every time Sisyphus, by the greatest of exertion and toil, reached the summit, the boulder rolled back down and he had to start all over again, day after day, day after day, after day, after day, after day.

Ever feel like Sisyphus? No, I don’t mean pushing a literal rock up a hill. But living life in a mortal body in a sinful world. Paul talks about it this way in our Epistle this Sunday, “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.” “Sufferings” Paul refers to it as. As a result of the fall into sin, we all suffer frustrations, toil, strife.

Wow! I know what you’re thinking – suffering – really, Pastor? Here we are in the dog days of summer. Can’t we hear a positive, uplifting message. Dear Children of God, this is the most positive, uplifting message your ears could ever hear. This is not a message about being miserable, this is a message of being eternally glorified with Jesus. That’s the message Paul has for you this morning. But first, Paul says, we will suffer with Jesus.

It's not even really a matter of "if." It's a matter of "when," "how." Sooner or later all of us face suffering, adversity, troubles.

You remember when you looked in your child's face and heard that small voice uttering those first cooing noises? Now you hear that voice say, "I hate you." You heard the voice of your spouse speak those words, "I do," but now you hear that voice say "I don't love you anymore." The phone rings and the only word you hear the voice on the other side speak is "died," and now it seems your life ended at the graveside. That nagging pain, that lump, led you to the doctor, who said, "Cancer." On paper, your retirement account look pretty big, but now it seems pretty small.

In our prayers this day, we remember our brothers and sisters in Christ of St. John Church, Pilger, Nebraska. The last weeks have been a number of tornadoes which, quite literally, ripped apart the building of St. John's, along with damaging other churches in Nebraska and South Dakota, in addition to damaging the homes, livestock, and land of their members. I can assure you Lutheran Disaster Response is on the ground, helping our brothers and sisters rebuild their property and lives.

As if that is not enough, there is the greatest struggle we have all, the pain of putting "to death the deeds of the body." Last week, Paul reminded us that sin dwells in us, in our mortal bodies. We love Jesus – well, we are supposed to love Jesus more than anything, but we just love sin and delight in it. Putting to death the desire for and love of the sin that dwells in us is painful. It is so very hard to keep sin from ruling our bodies and lives, determining our behavior and our values. To be certain, it doesn't bother us to resist the sins we don't want to do, but the ones that appeal to us, comfort us, the ones we love, that's more than uncomfortable, that seems downright impossible.

And there's no shortage in the world of invitation and enticement to sin. If you don't go along with sin, you will be called "unloving." If you claim to keep the Commandments of Jesus because you love Jesus, you will be declared the problem, not the sin, not the lies of the devil, you, Dear Child of God.

The truth of the Gospel contradicts the wisdom of the world. It gets in the way, and it always accuses. Even when we proclaim the forgiveness of sins in Jesus, that message implicitly reminds people that they need forgiveness of their sins.

No one likes to think about it. No one likes to talk about it. But, those who confess the holy name of Jesus bear the cross of Jesus. Let's admit it: suffering is not our favorite subject. In us lives the flesh. And, the flesh loves comfort. We really don't want a religion that puts suffering at the heart of its message. Our flesh loves that theology of glory that says we can judge our nearness to God by how we are doing and how good we feel. You know – get a pay raise, have a bigger, newer home, hit the golf ball farther than your neighbor, the theology of glory says to you, "You're a better person than your neighbor. God loves you *more!*" And, of course, there's the other side of the coin of the theology of glory – you're sick, you're in the hospital, you're kid is arrested, you're just feeling sad and the weight of the world is on your shoulders – it means you've done bad and God is being bad to you. Ouch!

Fellow Redeemed in Christ, I do want to make one thing clear: we are not opposed to feeling good. There is nothing wrong about feeling the joy and peace of your faith. But, we must ever remember that we walk by faith, not the feeling and emotions of the moment. I should also add that Paul says we will suffer with Jesus, we should not look for pain or trouble or

hardship to fill us with self-pity and we can make ourselves martyrs. Oh, and one other thing – suffering is not some type of work we do to earn brownie points with God.

Suffering is simply a statement of fact. It's a guarantee and a promise to how things are and how things will be when we follow Jesus. Paul's words are not Law, but Gospel truth of the salvation which is yours by God's grace in Christ Jesus. Yes – you will suffer when you remain faithful to Jesus. Remain faithful to Jesus and suffering will find you. The devil wants nothing more than to tear that saving faith away from you. You are the reason the devil works around the clock. He wants you, and he won't let up on you until you breathe your last and rest from your labors in the bosom of Jesus.

Our standing, our relationship, our nearness to God is measured by the cross of Jesus Christ. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we children of God," Paul says. We are children of God not because of what we do or what we do not do, but because of the cross of Jesus. God so loved you that He gave His only-begotten Son to suffer and die for you, paying the price of your sin and damnation with His own body and blood. The sin that separated you from God and made you His enemy is gone in the blood of Jesus. All of His anger was poured out on Jesus, so that it would not be on you. Marked by that blood, you are now a child of God, and Paul says, if you are a child of God, then you are also an heir of God and a fellow heir with Christ.

The cross has made us children of God and a child of God cannot help but suffer with Christ. And Paul tells us that the fact that we are now suffering with Jesus is a pledge, a guarantee, of our being glorified with Jesus.

As a baptized child of God and co-heir with Christ you are never alone in your faith. Christ Jesus Himself is right there with you. His rod and His staff comfort you. Jesus feeds you in the Seed of the Word that He sows in you through the hearing of that Word and the eating and drinking of His body and blood that it may produce of fruit of patience, peace, joy, faithfulness, self-control, even as you live under the cross.

Patience – that’s the work of the Holy Spirit us. The sufferings of this present time can be tolerated when we know what the future has in store for us. We are not like Sisyphus, enduring suffering and trouble, day after day, today and forever. We know our end. We are the children of God and as His children, His heirs. The glory of heaven awaits us. God will deliver us from the decay and frustration and suffering of sin.

The 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Revelation gives us a brief glimpse of the glory of heaven to come. That brief glimpse of that glory ends with the words, “[God] will wipe all the tears from our eyes. And so we pray, “Thy kingdom come.”