

## ROMANS 8:14-17 Pentecots 2019

I came across a modern parable a while back:

The story goes that there was young man who escaped a life of oppression in his dysfunctional home, hoping to experience a life of freedom out in the world. Unfortunately things did not go as he dreamed, and within a few short years, he was doing it tough, scrounging his food and sleeping on the street. As the years went by, the man became accustomed to his life as a street person.

Then one memorable day, he was bailed up by a young woman in a business suit, who asked his name, and other questions which helped her identify him. It turned out that a very wealthy uncle had left him his country mansion in his will.

The man was now heir to a huge fortune. He promptly packed up his swag and hitched his way to his uncle's estate. When he got there, he entered the foyer, and was so impressed by its grandeur, that he opened his swag, set up camp right there in the foyer, and refused to be moved.

Because of his fear that he might lose what he saw in front of him, the man missed out on enjoying the opulent bedrooms, the huge marble bathrooms, the plushly carpeted living rooms, and the ornate ballroom, all of which were part of his rich inheritance.

Sometimes God's people can be a little like that, staying anchored to what is concrete and familiar, when they could really soar on the wings of the Spirit, fulfilling their destiny in God, and enjoying to the full the life he promises.

Our reading from Romans this morning is only four verses, but in them, we find a wealth of insight to help us as we seek to live in fullness of the Holy Spirit.

**1. The first insight from these verses is about experiencing the leading of God's Spirit** - a concept we have been looking at over the last couple of weeks.

**v14 tells us, "all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."**

There are actually two shades of meaning in this sentence:

It's a subtle difference, but in a nutshell,  
*Someone led by the Spirit is a child of God.* The corollary being, *If you are a child of God, you will be led by the Spirit.*

in this verse we see both evidence of a father-child relationship, and at the same time, an interaction of a father with his child.

We enter into this relationship when we surrender our lives to Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

### **So what does it really mean to be “led by the Spirit”?**

When Jay and I were first married, we attended a church where there was a part time family worker. She also worked part time in another church. She and the minister from the other church ended up falling in love, and she told us that the Holy Spirit had brought them together. They were soul mates, and the other minister felt he was being led to divorce his wife and marry the family worker, so their ministries would be strengthened.

Really?

Being “led” by the Spirit does not mean just attaching that expression to something we really want to do, without being discerning, or testing that thought against the weight of Scripture, and the wisdom of the Church.

#### **● Being led by the Spirit means being discerning.**

You may remember from our Acts reading a couple of weeks ago, that Paul certainly experienced this.

When he and Silas were traveling in the Roman provinces, they tried hard to enter Asia, but the Holy Spirit thwarted their efforts. It was a definite “no” to their plans.

But as they continued in their work of serving God, they soon received leading in a very positive sense. In a dream, Paul received a vision of a man Macedonia calling them to come and visit them.

They ended up having a fruitful ministry amongst the people there.

It is important for us as believers to be alert enough to the Holy Spirit’s promptings, that we can discern his ‘no-s’ as well as his ‘yes-s.’ And then of course, we need to respond in obedience.

#### **● Being led by the Spirit means being obedient.**

We know Jesus was “led” into the wilderness following his baptism. In Luke 4:1 says “**Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.**” In this verse, we see that to be “led by the Spirit” is to be alert to God’s promptings, and to act in obedience.

**2. A second insight we receive from the Romans passage is about living free from fear.** Paul says in v15, *“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”*

Having pointed out that as God’s children, we will be led by the Spirit of God, Paul hastens to add in verse 15 that *this does not mean we have “received the spirit of bondage again to fear.”*

**God is not like the Mafia.** Most of us have seen enough TV to know that Mafia or gang bosses use fear to control their members. If they don’t toe the line, or if they fail, it’s curtains! This was also the way the Romans exercised power - evidenced in the crucifixion. The people they’d conquered were considered slaves, and they controlled them through fear.

Paul drew out a striking contrast. To surrender one’s life to God’s control was nothing like being under the control of the Romans. They were the opposite of slaves who obeyed for fear of reprisals from their master. They were sons and daughters who had been adopted into God’s family - Jew and Gentile alike! This meant there was a relationship of love that undergirded every interaction between the Spirit of God and his child. A relationship loving enough, that we can call God ‘Daddy.’

The term ‘Abba’, though not a way a Jew would ever dare to address God, was the term Jesus used in his agonised prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is a term of endearment, intimacy and trust.

**So in addition to being led by the Spirit, the believer enjoys a great sense of liberty as a son or daughter of God.** Instead of being motivated by fear, God’s children can rest in his intimate and affectionate love.

**3. A third insight from this passage** is the picture of life in the Spirit that begins to emerge.

Paul continues in v16, *“it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,”*

Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we can see there is leading, liberating, and loving, but, in addition, Paul speaks of the learning experience we may have through Him. This learning experience is all about the interplay of the human spirit with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In human reproduction, we know there is there is an ovum and a sperm. An ovum on it’s own, unfertilised, will never reach it’s potential. But once an ovum is penetrated by the sperm, then it bursts forth into the miracle of a new life. There’s a sense in which, when Paul says the Holy Spirit bears

witness with our Spirit, that it is something like fertilisation. The Spirit of God penetrates the human spirit, and a new life bursts forth.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” When we surrender to God, and his Spirit comes to live within us, our human spirit is penetrated by the Holy Spirit, and we become his children, able to realise all that is in store for us by his grace.

**4. Which leads us to a final insight from this passage: Paul takes us from the idea of being children, to being ‘heirs’.**

**v17 “and if (we are) children, then (we are) heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”**

Though an earthly father must die to leave an inheritance, God will never die, so there is a limit to this analogy, But the amazing thought here is that the believer can expect to share in the inheritance that Peter described as “**an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you**” ([1Pe 1:4](#)).

An inheritance from God is perhaps hard for us to get our heads around, so Paul says that we are also ‘**joint-heirs with Christ.**’ Though we may not know what’s in store for us, the Scriptures clearly tell us that Christ’s inheritance is that he will be clothed with the glory that was His before the worlds were created! This means that in some way we will not only see His glory but share in it too. The glory is His, by right, but will be ours by grace.

All a bit hard to get our heads around, but amazing nonetheless.

The last part of v17 warns us that our kinship with Christ means we will also suffer with him. Note that the word is ‘**will**’, not ‘**may**.’

That suffering can take many forms as we follow the leading of the Spirit in our lives. For some, it will mean the ultimate sacrifice - martyrdom. For others, it may mean persecution, or at the very least, ridicule.

It may also mean sacrifice and even privation as we seek to follow Christ’s commands to love God with our whole heart and others as ourselves. People such as St Francis and Mother Theresa come to mind, or missionaries who give up a comfortable life to take the Gospel into hostile places; or even the humble believer who works tirelessly to serve God in their church, or among the lonely or destitute, or who goes out to share God’s message with children...

If we truly follow Christ, and share in his inheritance, we will also share in his suffering.

Thinking back to our contemporary parable, where the homeless man set up camp in the foyer of the mansion: the insights from today's passage encourage us to lay aside our low expectations, our small ambitions; and instead, to step deeper into the leading, liberating, loving and empowering relationship that is ours in Christ. through the Holy Spirit.

Let us give thanks for Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit.