

WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN
Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost, 2020
Romans 8:12-17

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before, Romans 8:12-17: ¹² **Therefore, fellow-Christians, we are in debt, not to the sinful nature, to live according to the sinful nature.** ¹³ **For, if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die. However, if, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** ¹⁴ **For all who are led by God's Spirit are God's children.** ¹⁵ **For you have not received a spirit of slavery again, to make you afraid but have received the Spirit, who adopts, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father!"** ¹⁶ **The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirits that we are God's children,** ¹⁷ **and that, if we are children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, since indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are God's children and heirs of heaven because He says so. In God's kingdom, there are no second-rate or second-class citizens. We are alike - every one of us is precious to Him. Each of us carries in the eyes of God the same value as His only Son. That is why we cry, "**Abba, Father!**" "Abba" is the Aramaic word for "Father." When Paul repeats these two words here, he is doing so as if to say that we cry out, "Abba, *which means* 'Father'".

Paul makes the point that we "**have not received a spirit of slavery,**" but the Spirit **who adopts**, namely, the Holy Spirit who "**Himself testifies with our spirits that we are God's children.**" That is why we can call God our Father.

That's the good news, but there is something else in this passage, something that most people do not consider to be so good - or at least so *happy*. This news is that we are "**joint heirs with Christ,**" to inherit everything Jesus inherits, right along with Him, but only if "**we suffer with Him.**" The inheriting part is, of course, fantastic news, but it is linked to the news, commitment, and expectation that as the children of God we are going to suffer, and not just suffer like the people of this world do, but to suffer with Christ!

We cannot help but suffer as Christians. We can't avoid it, but we have to deal with the flesh, which loves its comfort. The truth Paul reveals is that we are not joint heirs with Christ if we do not suffer with Him. Our flesh, on the other hand, has invented that theology of glory that says we can measure our nearness to God by how well we are doing and how good we feel.

Now, I don't want you to think that there is anything wrong with feeling good. Of course, we all enjoy good feelings. Neither does Scripture teach that we should look for pain and trouble to make us feel Christian or measure our nearness to God by our pain level. That last theology is as bad as the first - and it too is a Theology of Glory, however twisted. Our nearness to God is not measured by feelings, but by the cross of Jesus Christ. That was where Jesus died for us. Any other proposed sign of God's favour is pagan and idolatry. Christians may and do enjoy life just as much as anyone else when they have reason, but the child of God cannot help but suffer with Christ, because **we are God's children.**

We suffer, for example, the pains of putting to death the deeds of the body. The effort of stopping sin from ruling in our bodies and keeping sin from determining our behaviour and our words and our values is painful. Sin is natural to us. Ceasing from sins is uncomfortable. It feels like we are giving up something we enjoy. That isn't necessarily the case, but it feels that way. We crave, we lust, and it feels horrible to deny that part of us that wants to sin. It doesn't necessarily bother us to resist the sins we don't want to do, mind you, just the ones that appeal to us personally, at the moment.

Then there is no shortage in the world of invitation and enticement to sin. In fact, if we don't go along in sin, we are labelled as "*goody-two-shoes.*" We are said to be no fun, or are unrealistic, or are old-fashioned and out of date. We are a wet-blanket or an obstacle to all those around. We just don't fit in - and people around us who belong to the world and not to God have no problem making that clear to us. And if others get the sense that we are taking the moral

high ground, they will spare no effort to make sure we know that, in their opinion, the problem is not what we are doing, it is the way we are doing it, our style, not our substance, that is causing the flack. Doing right and not wrong often leads to pain for the child of God.

We Christians also suffer for standing firm on the truth. The pain of the truth is that it seems true to no one but the believer. It contradicts the wisdom of this world. It is pure and true, not practical and useful. It gets in the way, and it always accuses. Even when God's Word tells us that "*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son*" (John 3:16), how dare it implicitly accuse us of *needing* that forgiveness in the first place! And hearing the truth always accuses us of error and ignorance - and we can tolerate almost anything but being called "wrong" or "stupid." God's truth tells us that truth matters, and we don't naturally want the truth to matter.

Standing on the truth makes enemies. The world around us loves compromise. Patience with error is stylish. Letting people wander in foolish blindness is considered a kindness, while correcting them for their own benefit and safety is considered insensitive and arrogant and abrasive - and in today's world, racist. It is reminiscent of hunting rabbits - you wait for one to stop, and then you shoot it. Error is always on the move, and lies are very mobile, since they have no anchor in reality, while truth stands still. It never changes, and the devil and his servants in this world will always shoot at the ones who are standing on the truth because they are usually the ones standing still, intellectually. Now and again a stubborn error gets caught too, but truth is always the target of the uncommitted and unbelieving.

Children of God often suffer the pains of uncertainty - having no certainty but the Word of God. I know that sounds contradictory - but you know what I am referring to. We have no outward sign that the truth is the truth, or that our sins have been forgiven, or that we shall rise from the grave. All we really have is the Word of God. People will ask why *we* should be right and everyone else wrong. How dare we assert that truth and salvation are our exclusive properties!

Of course, they aren't, and we don't say things like that. Children of God have to deal with being lied to and lied about in many situations, and **we are God's children.** Truth and salvation are the gifts of God, but at the moment of the accusation, we all feel that pain of uncertainty. We have no outward sign to guarantee our faith is right and true, but the Word of God. That is sufficient, most of the time, but we are not perfect in faith, and so, those moments may come when we just flinch in uncertainty and must cling through the pain to the truth of God, without the feelings of confidence or absolute certainty that everyone else seems to have.

We must also endure the hatred of the world and the attacks of the false brethren. The world actually persecutes Christians. In our country, Christians are typically spared the most violent forms of it, but people are dying for their faith throughout the world. They aren't Australian Christians, so we don't see the pictures and hear their cries. Our government and our news media couldn't care less - they actually agree with the destruction philosophically, if not explicitly - so we don't hear the reports. They do not report the truth unless it serves their agenda, and our truth almost never serves their agenda. They are of "the world", and the world is persecuting Christians, and it is coming for us, sooner than you may think.

But the hardest part to deal with is the attacks of those who call themselves Christians and "brothers." One moment they seem to stand with you, and the next they don't. Suddenly, they say that the old truths are extreme. Closed Communion is unloving. Boldly confessing the truth is suddenly styled as pushy and aggressive. Holding fast to the word of truth is 16th century and stubborn and unreasonable.

These are among the pains we face, the things that we, as **God's children** must suffer if we are to walk with Jesus. We cannot run for cover or hide from the pain - to do so would require that we deny Jesus. We have nowhere to hide, except in silence, hiding our light under a container¹, keeping our heads down to avoid becoming the target for someone who hates the truth and those who cling to it. But salt that has lost its saltiness is worthless², and Jesus said that He would confess us before His Father if we confessed Him before men, and He would deny us before His Father if we denied Him before men.³ There is nowhere to hide, except in Jesus, and no one to seek out for company and encouragement, but one another in the Church.

"If we are children," then we are **"heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."** That is, if we stand faithfully,

¹ Matthew 5:15

² Matthew 5:13

³ Matthew 10:32-33

we shall also inherit along with Jesus, and enjoy glory and blessing and salvation with Him. That is the message Paul is giving us today, and if we stand faithfully, we shall suffer, just as Christ did. His sufferings have won for us life and salvation, forgiveness and the favour of Almighty God. Our sufferings witness that we really do trust in God, and they tell others that we do have a God, and a promise so wonderful and so sure that it is worth taking whatever they can throw at us in order to stand firm and faithful and receive the prize. Our faithfulness in the midst of the sufferings which belong to the adopted family of Jesus Christ witness better than any words we can speak to the truth and the wonder of the grace of God and the promises of salvation. Our faithfulness confesses for our heart the truth and power and reality of what our lips confess in the creed. It tells the world in truth **that we are God's children**.

Finally, a couple of useful principles as we walk together in the Lord. First, we cannot judge the truth by who, or how many, agree with us. No, we can only judge the truth by the Word. Following the crowd is not a useful habit for the child of God - studying the Word is.

Second, we cannot judge whether what we do is right by how it feels to do it, or how we feel having done it - only by the Word. Our flesh lies. Our emotions lie. We want to feel good, and the devil knows it, so we can feel good about some of the most horrific things. God's Word alone is our reliable guide.

The amazing truth, which we perceive only through the Word of God Himself who tells us this truth, is that we are His children. In Him, as our Father, we have a helper, a source of strength, a fortress of protection, and a Comforter. We also have the promise of the inheritance in glory. God invites us to fix our eyes on the goal, and the promise, and take comfort in the wonderful truth that He has claimed us to be His children, adopted us in Baptism, and has given us His Spirit to keep us and intercede for us. The truth of the Gospel is that now, by God's own doing and proclamation, **we are God's children!** Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord of all power and grace, since Your eyes watch over the righteous and Your ears listen to their cries, hear our prayers as we come before You in gratitude and praise for all Your mercies.

We remember our great sinfulness before You, O Lord, and confess it with repentant hearts. Do not treat us as we deserve, but forgive us because of Your limitless love, that we may experience anew the joy of Your salvation and always live to Your praise.

We thank You for the daily miracles of Your care and love. Help us to realise always that You open Your hand and satisfy the needs of all Your creation and fill our lives with everything good, and make us thankful people.

We praise You especially for the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You have sent to be the Saviour of the world. Grant that we may believe in Him with all our hearts, honour Him as our Lord, and live under Him in the kingdom He has established. Help us to obey His words eagerly, to love Him truly, and to serve Him joyfully.

Continue to enlighten our lives by Your Holy Spirit, so that they may produce the abundant fruits of righteousness. Enable us to grow in knowledge of Your truth, in self-control in our lives. Give us a firm faith, pious minds, pure hearts, affection and sympathy for all our fellow-Christians, and love for all people.

Raise up pastors who will be true fishers of men. Help all Your people to put aside human opinions and selfish concerns, and to follow Your Son wherever He leads them. Give unity of spirit to Your people. Uphold those Christians who are suffering for the sake of their faith; and give them strength and courage.

We pray for the nations of the earth. Put down tyranny and terrorism. Raise up leaders who acknowledge You and Your will. Bless our country Australia. Lead its people pursue all that is good, and to put aside all that is evil. Frustrate the designs of those who want to promote murder through abortion and euthanasia.

We thank You for giving us the patience to wait out the restrictions that have kept us from coming together to worship in Your house. Thank You for not taking Your Word away from us during this time, but for giving us the use of technology so that Your Word could continue to be proclaimed to Your children.

Hear the cry of the suffering. Help them in body and spirit, and save them for Your mercy's sake. And, as we are only pilgrims in this world, guide and keep us, and bring us all at last to our heavenly home.

Receive these prayers, which we offer in the name of the author of life, Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the

Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The 6th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10)

Isaiah 55:10-13

¹⁰ For, as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not go back there without watering the earth and causing it to bring forth and to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so My Word will be, which goes out of My mouth. It will not return to Me without results but will accomplish what I desire and be successful in what I have sent it to do.”

¹² For you will go out with joy and be led out in peace. The mountains and the hills will break into shouts of joy in your presence, and all the trees in the field will clap their hands. ¹³ A cypress tree will grow up instead of the thorn-bush, and a myrtle tree will grow up instead of the stinging nettle. This will also make a name for the LORD and become an everlasting sign, which will not be cut off.

Romans 8:12-17

¹² Therefore, fellow-Christians, we are in debt, not to the sinful nature, to live according to the sinful nature.

¹³ For, if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die. However, if, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s children. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery again, to make you afraid but have received the Spirit, who adopts, by whom we cry, “Abba, Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirits that we are God’s children, ¹⁷ and that, if we are children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, since indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat down beside the sea. ² However, such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat in it, while the entire crowd was standing on the shore. ³ Then He told them many things in parables. He said, “Look! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ While he was sowing, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on the stony places, where they did not have much soil. Because their soil was not deep, the seeds came up quickly. ⁶ However, when the sun rose, they were scorched and, because they had no root, they withered. ⁷ Other seeds fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them. ⁸ However, other seeds fell

on the good soil and produced grain, some a hundred, some sixty and some thirty times as much. ⁹ Let the one who has ears listen! ...

¹⁸ “Therefore, hear the parable of the sower! ¹⁹ When anyone hears the Word of the kingdom but does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This one is he who has been sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who has been sown on the stony places is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ but does not have root in himself. He lasts for only a short time and, when trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he immediately falls away. ²² The person who has been sown among thorns is one who hears the Word, but the worry of the world and the seduction that comes from riches choke the Word, and it does not produce anything. ²³ However, the person who has been sown on the good soil is the one who hears the Word and understands it, and so produces and yields, some-times a hundred, sometimes sixty and sometimes thirty times as much.”