

SERMONS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S

You Can Tell

The Day of Pentecost, Year C

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Romans 8:14-17 (NIV)

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The Day of Pentecost is when we remember when God first gave the Holy Spirit to Jesus' followers gathered in Jerusalem in our first reading from the second chapter of Acts. But when we step back and look at the whole book, we'll see that the giving of the Holy Spirit is just the first step in fulfilling what Jesus promised the apostles in the first chapter, verse 8: **"you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

They begin in Jerusalem and Judea with today's reading, and then spread the gospel to Samaria in chapter 8, and then throughout the Roman Empire, ending at Rome itself. The Book of Acts shows us that the job of the Holy Spirit isn't just to give supernatural evidence that God is real. It's to give Jesus' people power to be his witnesses; that is, to tell other people about who he is and what he has done.

So, who is Jesus, and what has he done? Jesus is God's Son. In fact, he is so much God's Son that he tells Philip in John 14:9 **"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."** Jesus loves what the Father loves, Jesus is

interested in what the Father is interested in, and Jesus does what the Father does, period.

What has Jesus done? As he says towards the end of John 14, **“the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.” (John 14:31)** Part of what the Father commanded Jesus was to die on the cross for the sins of those who put their trust in him. By doing exactly as his Father has commanded him, Jesus has brought them with him through death into eternal life by giving them new birth through the Holy Spirit. They have been born again as sons and daughters of God.

So what does it mean to be sons and daughters of God the Father? The story of my own father can help us here. My father actually had two fathers. He was born in a small town in the north of Argentina. His father, Mario, was a railroad employee with a modest income. He and his wife Rita had two sons. But when my father, their third son was only a week old, his mother Rita died, leaving my grandfather Mario with two older boys to take care of, as well as a week-old baby. Rita’s sister, Rosa, lived in the same town. She was married to a wealthy German immigrant named Prebisch. She and her husband took my father into their family as a baby. The Prebisches had five children considerably older than my father. He grew up with a lot of attention and was the joy of the Prebisch family. “Papa Prebisch,” as he called his uncle, was a prosperous businessman. My father’s cousins all did well. The Prebisch daughters married well, and one of the Prebisch sons became a physician, another a noted Argentine architect, and another a world-famous economist.

My father’s three brothers, who were raised by my grandfather, had careers as minor government employees. But because he grew up in the family of “Papa Prebisch” my father went on to get a master’s from Harvard and have career in international economics and finance.

Even though he was the son of Mario Gonzalez del Solar, my father’s life was that of a son of “Papa Prebisch.” He loved the things the Prebisches loved, he was interested in the things the Prebisches were interested in, and he did the kinds of things the Prebisches did. You could tell.

Jesus, God’s Son, loves what the Father loves, is interested in what the Father is interested in, and does what the Father does. Like my father we have two fathers—our own natural fathers, and God the Father. As God’s Sons and daughters through adoption, we are to love, be interested in, and do the the things of God our Father.

To make that possible, Jesus promises to **“ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”** Whether they knew it or not, what drew the apostles and the huge crowds to Jesus was the fact that he is the Son of God. What they saw in his amazing life was the Father working through him. You could tell. It was the Holy Spirit who gave Jesus the power to show off God’s wonderful love and power and wisdom. In this morning’s gospel Jesus is telling Philip that all the time he and the other apostles have been around him, they’ve been around the Holy Spirit. But soon he’s going back to the Father, and the Holy Spirit will come into them and give them the power to show God off in the same way as Jesus. Jesus showed off God’s love most perfectly, in a way we never can, by dying on the cross for our sins. Through his death and his resurrection, he gives us new birth through the Holy Spirit as the Father’s sons and daughters.

My father was led by, influenced by, schooled by the “spirit” of the Prebisch family and had a life like a Prebisch. You could tell. This is what Paul is explaining in our second reading from Romans 8: **“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”** The sons and daughters of God don’t behave like someone else’s children. You can tell. When we put our faith in Christ and ask for and receive his gift of eternal life and the Holy Spirit, we open ourselves to be led by, influenced by, and schooled by the Spirit of God because we are the sons and daughters of God. The Spirit of God isn’t the spirit of religious perfection that demands that we do everything right. That’s the **“spirit of fear”**. We can’t “do everything right” because we’re still influenced by our own heritage as sinners.

The Spirit of God communicates to us God’s constant love and forgiveness and his care for us in his costly gift of Jesus for us. God’s Spirit makes himself known in our own spirit and mind and emotions. He encourages us to call God our Father. Think of it! My human father may have had a career in international economics, but God my Father created the nebulae, the galaxies, the billions of stars and solar systems, the beauty of this earth and every human being that ever lived! I am related to him!

Like our older brother, we’re to show off our Father. We do that by showing off our older brother, because as he said, **“anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”** In other words, we are to be Jesus’ witnesses. We are to tell people who he is—the Son of God, the Savior of humankind, and the firstborn of a huge family of brothers and sisters. And we’re to tell him what he has done: died for our sins and risen to eternal life to give us new birth through the Holy Spirit as God’s own daughters and sons.

And, as Paul says, **“if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”** The heirs of an estate are usually the children. In our case, Jesus is the first-born, and we are his brothers and sisters through adoption. What do we inherit? Everything!

But there’s a catch—we have to **“share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”** Sound daunting? It’s not, if you think about it. Christ suffered because there are lots of people in this world that don’t recognize the Holy Spirit working in God’s people, and don’t want any part of God. They’d rather live their own way. Sometimes they want their own way so badly that they mistreat God’s people, as they mistreated Jesus. They were the reason for his sufferings. They can make us suffer by suggesting that we’re not cool, or we’re not sophisticated, or we’re foolish do-gooders, or something worse.

On the other hand, whether they love God or not, everybody in this life has suffering. If we don’t suffer with Jesus, we’ll suffer without him, and that’s a terrible thing to contemplate. But even in our suffering, the Holy Spirit reminds us whose children we are. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us love what God our Father loves—people who need him. We need to ask the Spirit to help us be interested in what God our Father is interested in—bringing people to trust and obey him for their own good and for his glory. And we need to ask the Spirit to give us power to do what our Father has done for us—give ourselves for the life of others.

Today we’ll welcome Kathleen Marie Barnes into Christ’s Church through baptism. On Katie’s behalf, her parents and godparents will receive Jesus Christ as Savior, promise to put their whole trust in his grace and love, and follow and obey him as Lord. If you haven’t done any of these things, let me suggest that you respond to those questions in the quiet of your own heart. Then we’ll renew the covenant we all made when we were baptized. Let me suggest you do this earnestly and sincerely. Then we’ll pray for Katie. Among other things, we’ll ask that she be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let me suggest you ask for the Spirit to fill you as well.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and made us your sons and daughters through the Holy Spirit. Renew in us the covenant you made with us at our Baptism. Send us out in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.