

Isaiah 6:1-8
Trinity Sunday

Romans 8:12-17

May 30, 2021

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

**CHILDREN OF GOD, HEIRS WITH CHRIST,
LED BY THE SPIRIT**

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

John Wesley, 18th century British cleric, theologian, evangelist, and leader of the revival movement in the Church of England known as Methodism, once said, “Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God.”

My hope, prayer, and goal on this Trinity Sunday, as on every Trinity Sunday, is to proclaim the promise and mystery of the Triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — and not to offer a lecture that “explains” the unfathomable mystery of God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

Let me begin, then, where I always end each Sunday morning, with the great Trinitarian benediction from 2 Corinthians 13:13: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” As we hear God’s Word on this Trinity Sunday and open our hearts and lives to God’s Word, may Christ’s grace, God’s love, and the Holy Spirit’s fellowship surround us and fill us and draw us ever deeper into God’s family.

In true Trinitarian (and some would say Presbyterian) form, today’s sermon has three parts, based on what the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8 about our lives as believers in and followers of the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

FIRST, we are . . . Children of God . . .

On Tuesday I was with minister colleagues and friends for a day retreat at Camp Kirkwood. During one of our worship times, the worship leader said, “I have many favorite Bible verses, but I think my favorite Bible verse is 1 John 3:1 — ‘See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.’”

Here’s how Paul describes who we are now because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 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!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God . . .” (Romans 8:14-16)

On the 25th day of September 1991, and again on the 28th day of November 1995, the Clerk of the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division, in Halifax County, North Carolina “made the following findings of fact and law” and “ordered, adjudged, and decreed by the court . . . that from the date of the entry of this Order herein, the said minor is declared ***adopted for life*** by the petitioners Philip Knox Gladden and

Nancy Elise Jackson Gladden. . .” Thirty years and twenty-six years later, I still get a thrill reading those words — “adopted for life.”

. . . but the decree doesn’t end with those three words. They lay the foundation for a lifelong relationship, expressed this way in the adoption decree: “the relationship of parents and child, together with all the rights, responsibilities, and duties of the relationship of parents and child, shall exist between said child and the petitioners. That said child shall henceforth be known by the name of Philip Jackson Gladden, Natalie Elise Gladden.”

Doesn’t that sound a lot like what I say when I baptize someone? “Child of the covenant, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Child of the covenant, in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit, marked as God’s own forever, and called to follow Christ in mission. Amen.” We could add the promise, “said child shall henceforth be known by the name of Child of God.”

Here’s how *The Message* expresses that truth: “This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It’s adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike ‘What’s next, Papa?’ God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children.”

Since we are children of God, adopted for life, then SECOND, we are “heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.”

Several years ago, at a meeting of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina, Rev. David Walker was the preacher for the day. He looked out at all of the elders and ministers gathered there in the lunchroom of the Burgaw Elementary School and said, “If God is our Father, then you are my family.” The doctrine of the Trinity may be hard to understand and explain, but at its core it means that we are invited into the loving relationship of communion and unity and family of God that we know and experience through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And that, church family, means that our faith may be personal, but it is never private. Adoption as children of God means we are welcomed into a large family.

During Monday night’s Bible study, Dr. Dan shared a portion of a sermon he had read as he got ready for our discussion of God’s Word in Romans 8. Rev. Jo Anne Taylor, who serves a United Methodist Congregation, has a blog called “A pastor sings.” In her sermon called “The Spirit of Adoption,” she proclaimed, “You belong, not only to God, but to God’s whole family. This is not an individual undertaking, and it isn’t something you do by your own strength or will . . . Every time [Paul] says ‘you’ he is saying ‘all of you.’ We are all part of this family: brothers and sisters with Christ together, through the Spirit of adoption.”¹

A number of years ago, when my mom was moving from her condo to an assisted living facility, she summoned me, my brother, my sister, and our spouses to Atlanta to sort through “our stuff.” As we gathered in her small living room and started to look through the piles she had conveniently made ahead of time, I said, “I just want to say right from the start, there are a few things I wouldn’t mind having, but there is absolutely nothing here that is worth arguing over and having a falling out about.” My siblings and I agreed and we got back to sorting. January a year ago Susan, David, and I

met again at Susan's house for the final sorting and divvying up of our mom's things. I brought home a number of physical items, but more than that, I brought home the inheritance of all of the memories that make me thankful for being a child of my mother and father.

That's the promise of being children of God — we are heirs to “an unbelievable inheritance!” (as *The Message* puts it). There's more than enough for everyone. Our inheritance as joint heirs with Christ helps us live as God's children, helps us say, “Here am I, send me!” when our God asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for me?” And we can be thankful that we are children of God.

Finally, since we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ, THIRD we are led by the Spirit. This is a great continuation of Paul's teaching from last Sunday about living by the Spirit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26). Remember what Paul told us? “Live by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh . . . But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law . . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”

Again, *The Message* helps us hear with new ears Paul's words about life as God's children, joint heirs with Christ, who are led by the Spirit: “So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go!”

On Tuesday's day-retreat at Kirkwood, a good friend said, “Jesus is always out in front of us, calling us to follow him. Why would we want to ‘go back’ to the way things used to be?” That's a good description of what it means to be led by the Spirit. We go where God calls us through Christ and led by the Holy Spirit. Right there we are reminded and encouraged that when we go forward we never go alone.

Although Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is said to have used the three-leaved shamrock to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — the traditional prayer of St. Patrick may be an even more powerful witness to his trust in the Triune God and the importance for our lives as children of God, heirs with Christ, who are led by the Spirit. Traditionally called “St. Patrick's Breastplate,” the prayer is written in the form of an incantation for protection on a journey. It's appropriate for this journey of life and faith that we are one. It's particularly appropriate considering the journey we have been on through COVID-19 during the last fifteen months and the still unknown journey ahead of us as we make our way out of the pandemic. As we listen to Patrick's prayer, let us make it our own as we ask “What's next, Papa?”

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,

Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

I arise today

Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.

I arise today

Through the strength of the love of cherubim,
In the obedience of angels,
In the service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In the predictions of prophets,
In the preaching of apostles,
In the faith of confessors,
In the innocence of holy virgins,
In the deeds of righteous men.

I arise today, through

The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendor of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.

I arise today, through

God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near.

I summon today
All these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of reward.
Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness of the Creator of creation.

Let us pray: Holy God, source of all goodness, you gave your Son for the life of the world and sent your Spirit that your love might abide within us. Teach us how to love each other this day, that we may have life, and have it abundantly, with you, in Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

NOTES

¹Jo Anne Taylor, "The Spirit of Adoption — Sermon on Romans 8:12-17 (Trinity B)," May 27, 2018 at www.pastorsings.com.