

Sermon for May 14, 2016
Pentecost Sunday

Often we wonder how words written over two thousand years ago can relate to our lives today, but today's readings really struck a note with me and with what's going on today; especially Paul's words to the Romans: "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption." We have been given not a spirit of fear, but one of adoption; a spirit of adoption to give us the confidence and courage that comes from knowing that we are chosen, accepted, and loved for who we are.

Not fear, but courage; but fear is all around us today. There are not only the fears that we naturally have, but because of our political climate fear is also being created by our political candidates so we will vote for them as the remedy for our fears. We fear that anyone who isn't like us is a terrorist. We fear the loss of our job. We fear the death of loved ones. We fear the loss of this congregation. We fear that war will never end. There are a lot of fears out there today.

And while we're caught up in that fear, it's hard to see anything else; which is why Paul's words are so powerful and necessary to hear today. "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, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

This is what the work of the Holy Spirit is about—to come along side us in times of anxiety and remind us that because we are God's sons and daughters, we do not have to give in to fear. In fact Paul goes a little further. We are not only

sons and daughters of God, we are heirs of God, those destined to inherit all good things. And if that's not enough, we are co-heirs with Christ. Co-heirs! God has called us worthy to receive all the inheritance and credit and reward and favor that Christ deserves and is given. When we are loved that fiercely not even fear can keep us down.

Our Acts story today also depicts a group of believers who had everything to fear and had been crippled by fear when they locked themselves in the upper room. And yet on Pentecost they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, a Spirit that encourages them and equips them to go out into the market place and witness to their faith in Christ. When they did this they not only risked being labeled as drunkards, but also face the real risk of being accused of committing treason; an act punished by the same crucifixion that Jesus endured. And yet empowered by the Holy Spirit, they find the courage not simply to resist fear, but to step out in confidence and joy!

Our reading from John tells us pretty much the same. Philip asks Jesus his question because he's anxious. Anxious because this is the night before Jesus' crucifixion and Jesus has already told the disciples that he will be leaving them. And Philip, along with the rest of the disciples, is anxious, worried and even afraid. And so he says, "Lord, just show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." We're used to calling God Father, we grow up learning to speak of God in this way so we don't see the daring of Philip's request. Keep in mind that God was considered to be so awesome, so wholly and completely other from we humans, that religious Jews like Philip wouldn't even speak the divine name of God out

loud! And yet here Philip is asking to see God! Why, because he's afraid and he wants comfort, assurance and security.

But instead of certainty, Jesus offers Philip himself: "Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father." Jesus has come in order that we might know that God is love, that God's love is big enough for the whole world and that God loved the whole world so much that God would go to any length—even to the point of dying alone on a cross—so that we would know God's love. When we know that love; we can be emboldened to live with courage and hope. And it's the work of the Holy Spirit to come along side of us whenever we are tempted to forget this love and to remind us and root us back into that love.

We did not receive a spirit of slavery that would allow us to fall back into fear, but we have received a spirit of adoption. So today we celebrate and give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the One who came and continues to come to remind us of God's love for us in Jesus, the One who comes amid all kinds of fears to remind us that the future is in God's hands, the One who calls us out of our places of fear in order to serve others in love, courage and hope.

Today you should have received a blank piece of paper along with your bulletin. I want you to take it out now and write down one fear that you have with which you need the help of the Holy Spirit. Do not sign your name to the cards, God knows who you are, fold them and pass them in with the offering plate. They will be gathered and prayed for along with my prayers for the congregation.

I leave you now with the words that were spoken to Zechariah at the announcement that Elizabeth would bear a son, to Mary that she would bear the

Son of God, to the shepherds at Christmas at the birth of Christ, to the disciples on Easter and to the Christians in Rome, "Fear not!" And to remind you that you are blessed with the spirit of courage, the spirit of adoption, the spirit of the living Christ.