



FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“The Father Who Refused to Let Go”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Galatians 5:16-18

A father was holding the hand of his young son as they went for a walk.

His grasp was firm, yet loving, not *forcing* the child, but gently *leading* him in the way he should go. The boy had every reason to trust his father; and yet, after a while, he started to become *restless* and *discontent* with the path his father had chosen. He saw new opportunities and unexplored avenues. And the more his curiosity was piqued, the more he struggled *against* his father, fighting to free himself from the hand that held him and to pursue these other paths. But the father, knowing well the danger of letting his son wander free, refused to let go, holding tighter still and patiently directing his son back to the way he knew was right. So they went together, arriving safely at their destination.

You are the child in this parable.

As a baptized Christian, you have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Jesus taught that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). But you *have* been! God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love for you, even when you were dead in your trespasses and sins, has made you alive together with Christ, giving you the new birth of water and of the Spirit in your baptism and forgiving you all your sins (Eph. 2:4-5; LSB 271). He has sent the Spirit of His Son into your heart, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave to the elementary principles of the world, but a son/daughter, and if a son/daughter, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:6-7).

And this is not your own doing. Just as you did not choose to be born into your *earthly* family, so was your rebirth into *God’s* family a gift that you received by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9). “You are a chosen race,” the apostle Peter wrote to Christians living two thousand years ago, “a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). In the same way, God has claimed *you* as His own; He has *redeemed* you, that is

purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, with the body and blood of His Son, Jesus, given and shed on the cross for you. He has redeemed you for a *purpose*: that you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. You were created in Christ Jesus for good works, that you should walk in them, being led by the Spirit, since you are no longer under the Law.

But, like the child in the parable,

You are restless and discontent.

You have every reason to trust your heavenly Father. Time and again, He has proven Himself to be *trustworthy*, keeping every single one of His promises, feeding you more than the birds of the air, clothing you much more than the lilies of the field (Matt. 6:26, 28-30). Never has He given you a serpent instead of a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg (Luke 11:11-12). Moreover, He knows the way. He was *there* when the foundations of the earth were laid (Job 38:4). He is perfect in knowledge.

But just because you are baptized and a child of God doesn't mean *you're* perfect. Jesus also said that "unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Yet, like most children, we seem to be in a big hurry to grow up. We're on this righteous path, being led by the Spirit, but we also see new opportunities and unexplored avenues, things that pique our curiosity, but to which God has said, "You shall not." Paul here refers to them the "works of the flesh," and, as he says, they are "evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these" (5:19-21). We can all read this list and find ourselves in it. We can see the ways in which we have struggled against God, fighting to free ourselves from His firm, yet loving grasp.

Why do we do this? James writes that "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his *own desire*" (James 1:14). The Spirit of God *is* at work in us, but opposed to Him stands the Old Adam, the sinful flesh, which lusts *against* the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Paul elsewhere describes this opposition as a *war* between the law of God, in which Christians find delight, and the law of sin, which remains even *after* Baptism (Rom. 7:22-23). So our attention is constantly being diverted *away* from the path of *righteousness* to the path of *evil* (Prov. 4:14),

Yet, as the father in the parable refused to let go of his son's hand,

So does your God refuse to let go of *you*.

You're His child. He cares for you, and He doesn't want any harm to come to you. And sin is harmful. That's what it says in the most difficult verse in today's readings, where Paul says, "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things [the list of sins mentioned earlier] will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21). Sin is separation from God, which means that those who pursue it, who *practice* it, like you practice a skill or an instrument and get *good* at it, pull away from God to their harm.

So God, knowing well the danger of letting us go free, *refuses* to let go, holding tighter still and patiently directing us back to the way He knows is right. The same Holy Spirit who called you to faith by the Gospel is alive and active in your heart to bring forth the fruits of that faith, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. "Against such things," Paul writes, "there is no law" (Gal. 5:23). These are things God *loves*. They are *helpful*, not harmful. And so, it is *God* who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), not *forcing* you, but gently *leading* you in the way you should go.

Naturally, this takes *time*. Children don't grow up overnight. They often fail and make mistakes. They get hurt. They *learn*. The truth is

We still have a long way to go before we learn not to fight God.

It's not going to be a smooth journey, for *any* of us; and were it not for the grace of God, we wouldn't even make it. We would run away, like a young child who doesn't know any better. But we are not only children, we are *God's* children. We are members of His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, and heirs of all the treasures of heaven. The gifts Christ freely gives He gives to you and me, and as He says in one of the most comforting verses in all of Scripture, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and *no one will snatch them out of my hand*" (John 10:28). We will, all of us who belong to Christ Jesus, arrive safely at our destination. For we are not alone. We have *help*: a Guide and a Protector, a Savior and a Father, who loves us and refuses to let go.

"I say then: Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." A father was holding the hand of his young son as they went for a walk...

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

Soli Deo gloria