

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Praise & Worship  
April 28, 2019  
Romans 8:12-17  
Teri Stief

Mark's talk and Tom's talk on the first part of Romans Chapter 8 focused on the fact that our bodies are dead because of sin, but our spirits are alive because of righteousness = God's divine mercy! And He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in us.

And so how are we to live, now that we are under the law of the Spirit and not the law of the flesh? We are new creations, different, set apart. 1 John 3:2 says "*Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" The consistency of the message is confirmation that this is right belief. St. Paul said it in Romans 8:14: *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*, St. John said it: *But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name"* John 1:12. And Jesus Himself said "*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.* Matthew 12:50

**<sup>12</sup>Consequently, brothers, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.**

Christian author Watchman Nee, in his book [The Normal Christian Life](#), spends quite a bit of time explaining how a dead person is not tempted to sin; a person can do no wrong when he's lying in a coffin! His language is strong about our condition as dead to sin and alive to God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also states "the believer enters through baptism into communion with Christ's death, is buried with him, and rises with him." (CCC para. 1227) Yet I find myself struggling with sin, as do all people, even saints (Romans 7:15-20). And this will be a lifelong struggle, because even though "*I have died with Christ and live no longer, but Christ lives in me*" (Galatians 2:20), still we exist and live in this flesh and in the world. So we take up a position of faith, in faith.

**<sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**

I have found, the more I practice accepting God's invitation to faith, His grace to live according to His Spirit, the invitation becomes easier to accept. Many years ago I decided to not take a particular job that seemed perfect for many reasons. I recall agonizing over the decision, because I wanted the position so strongly. It involved everything I loved: travel, living on my own in Austria. But I heard from the Lord, that he wanted me to give it up. I didn't listen and kept moving ahead with plans; I was not even able to read the Bible, I remember, I felt such guilt about not wanting to give it up, I couldn't even open the Bible. But once I made the decision to surrender and decline the offer, I felt such a sense of peace and calm about it, I knew it was the right decision, really immediately. Even when a couple people expressed concern that I had made the wrong decision, God gave me a profound conviction that He was pleased. I was able to read the psalms and I understood what the psalmist was saying about God's provision for me, and when Isaiah says "Your ways are not my ways." (Isaiah 55:8-9) I often remind myself of that experience when I am nervous about making a particular decision – you know, "fear of missing out." Making a decision for

something means making a decision against something else. But God our Father wants us to trust Him; that's what it has meant for me to live under the law of the Spirit. And, as promised, the more I choose to live according to the law of the Spirit, the more free I become. Free to choose the good. And the more I experience the benefit of making good choices, the easier it becomes to make good choices, because I have past personal experiences to encourage me.

**<sup>14</sup> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.**

As we walk in our identity as children of God, sons of God, heirs of God, it becomes a self-perpetuating choice – good begets good. When I first started trying to live an intentional Christian life, I was afraid that I would have to give up all the pleasures of life that I love: travel, rock-and-roll music, closing the party down. I love to socialize and have fun. I was afraid I would become a stodgy old boring person who never did anything fun or adventurous. But God has taught me over the years that He wants to give me good things, He wants me to be happy. And He's the one who gave me my personality and preferences – He just wants them to be in right order. Fr. Francis Martin once challenged me in confession to “stop living like a 12 year old” hopping from diversion to diversion, social event to social event. Even back in my 20's, before it was named, I had that “FOMO” (fear of missing out) that people talk about these days. I would cancel plans with a friend if something else better came along; I would try to cram all kinds of events and parties into one weekend, one day, just to make sure I did it all! But God has shown me how making a commitment to one or two important causes or people, allows me to give my all to that cause, that relationship, rather than splitting myself into a dozen different directions. And the fruit of making one or two commitments, and sticking to them in all circumstances, has helped me to really mature. I was single for a long time, and people often assume you are free and have no real commitments, so it was actually very affirming to be able to tell people, “No, I have a previous commitment!” And as a patient father does, the Lord shows me respect by allowing me to learn and grow – I may get hurt along the way, but that's how we learn. God is a gentleman, as many have said – he won't force us to obey him. But when I take a risk at his prompting, I am blessed in the process. I have confidence to take a risk because I know my Father's love for me, and I believe his promise that “...no one who believes in him will be put to shame.” (Romans 10:11)

**<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, “Abba, Father!”**

I really love St. Therese's autobiography *Story of a Soul*, about her life as the spoiled youngest daughter of a doting father. She had such a wonderfully close and supportive, affirming relationship with her father, she had no problem seeing God as a loving father. She knew exactly what that looked like, how it felt. I will guess that it has been a little more slow going for many of us; I know it has for me, coming from a northern European family culture, where showing affection was not a regular expectation. But no matter what your relationship with your natural father has been, now we are no longer living under the law of the flesh, but rather under the law of the Spirit. We have been born again of the Spirit, “*who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.*” John 1:13 And my relationship with my earthly father has never been closer than it is now, because I have asked God my

heavenly Father to show me how to love him, and I know we are both children of God. I also have allowed God to love me as a father in ways my father was not able to, and this fills me up with love overflowing to love my own father as never before, as a fellow son and heir of God.

**<sup>16</sup>The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**

My Bible translation, the New American Bible before revisions, says we are sons of God. I think this is an important distinction, when you consider the culture when this verse was written. Within the context of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, being specifically a son was much preferred to being just a child. A son was an heir – daughters didn't usually inherit much from their fathers. In addition to material inheritance, a son would more likely look like his father, be expected to act like his father, follow in his father's footsteps. Woman or man, male or female, we are all sons of God in this context. We are all heirs. Granted, daughters experience their father's love in ways unique to women, but I think the titles son and heir are significant.

**<sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.**

This verse always bothered me; like as if we could choose not to suffer! But how many people have you ever met, who have not suffered? Who, in your entire life, do you know who has not had any suffering in their life? No one. In this verse, as in life, it's not a question of whether or not you're going to suffer, but rather, what are you going to do with the suffering you face? You can choose to run from it, deny it, blame others, try to cover it up or make it go away. Or you can embrace it, make the best of it. What I like to do is consider the many people in the world who suffer without knowing the love of God the Father. How many people suffer without hope; without faith in God or heaven. Our suffering can be redemptive for their sake, as Christ's was for us. It doesn't make the suffering go away, but I have experienced that it makes it more tolerable. Like when I decided not to take that 'perfect' job, I experienced for myself what the Scriptures mean when they talk about suffering for what is good – I knew I was doing the right thing, what God wanted me to do, so I was confident even when others said they thought I was making a mistake. Also the many times I needed to keep a commitment and missed out on something fun – God blessed me with a sense of purpose, mission, and frankly maturity. Relationships in particular, are lasting in ways that fun at a party is not. There are many fun experiences that I do not need to have in order to have a fulfilling life, but committed relationships are very hard to come by, and require time and often sacrifice.

Relationships have become far more valuable to me than any particular experience I may have or place I can travel to. I used to travel quite a bit, and I recall once when I was travelling alone in the beautiful Austrian Alps, oh it was so beautiful, just breathtaking! But I had no one to share it with – when I looked at the views, I just sighed and thought to myself, that's beautiful. On that particular trip, it just so happened that a student in my study group in Vienna had decided to visit the same village where I was, and she knocked on my hotel room door one evening. I was so happy to see her, and we weren't even that close, but just to share some impressions with someone, it made all the difference in my trip. Now my husband and I try to plan our travels so that we also visit family or friends.

Traveling less internationally has been a change for me, but I have embraced it. I don't even have a current passport anymore, although we're talking about visiting friends in Mexico soon!

We can look at Jesus, recognize His sacrificial suffering on our behalf, join our suffering with His, consider His example of embracing His cross, taking that next step along the road to Calvary, not returning insult with insult. St. Paul says "*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church*" (Colossians 1:24) What is lacking is simply my participation in Jesus' cross. In a favorite version of the Way of the Cross that my husband and I like to pray, the writer says to Jesus "in carrying my cross, I carry yours with you. And though I bear a sliver only of your cross, you carry all of mine, except a sliver, in return." (Deacon Clarence Enzler, *Everyman's Way of the Cross*, Ave Maria Press, 1970) In that sense, as we embrace our suffering for Christ's sake, we share in his suffering, and therefore suffer with him, and so will be glorified with him.

The life of Jewish convert Edith Stein, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, ended in martyrdom at Auschwitz – she was killed, not firstly because she was a Christian, but firstly because she was Jewish. But her death can be counted a martyrdom because she had surrendered her entire life to Jesus – she herself said that she would die for Jesus, that all her sufferings were for Jesus. That's what she decided to "do" with the suffering she was offered in her life. She said: "In order to be an image of God, the spirit must turn to what is eternal, hold it in spirit, keep it in memory, and by loving it, embrace it in the will."

Thank God St. Paul's meditations on what it means to suffer with Christ don't end here – he continues in verse 18 with the hopeful statement "*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us.*" We'll have to wait a couple weeks before the next talk on that passage. Until then, let's consider the following questions in small groups:

1. How have you experienced freedom by living under the law of the Spirit?
2. How have you experienced your identity as a child/son/heir of God the Father?
3. What fruit have you seen from suffering in your life?