

“Real Good News“

Romans 8: 14-17

Pentecost, Confirmation Sunday, May 15, 2016

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Imagine, you wake up one morning, you get ready for the day, and there is a knock on the door, you open the door, and a very official looking person hands you a document that says that some uber-rich long lost relative has made you heir to a great fortune. Unrealistic you say?

Probably, but it has happened to a few people. It happened to poverty-stricken brothers Zsolt and Geza Peladi who lived outside Budapest, Hungary. They suddenly inherited a share of a \$4 billion fortune. Their mother apparently came from a wealthy family, but burned that bridge long ago. In the process she abandoned her children many years ago, but her passing re-forged the familial bond.

Or imagine the surprise that 70 randomly chosen people got when a stranger, Luis Carlos de Noronha Cabral da Camara, a wealthy Portuguese aristocrat picked them from the phone book to inherit his money instead of naming his family members as heirs.

Or imagine the surprise the 17 year old waitress Cara Wood received when she inherited a modest fortune of half a million dollars from a customer she waited on many times. Apparently he enjoyed Cara's company, and she must have treated him well.

So, never say never, but for today, imagine, something like this happens to you. You wake up one morning and find out that all your major financial worries are over for the rest of your life, and with that you really did not have to worry all that much about the future. How would you feel? What would you do? What would you do differently? And I don't mean what would you run out and buy – although I imagine that most of us would treat ourselves to something – but actually I mean, what would be different about your day-to-day attitudes, practices, habits, and outlook? How would knowing that your future is absolutely secure change your present?

I can see a few of us starting the search of a long-lost, wealthy relative as soon as we get home, but that is actually not what I want us to do.

I'd rather have us all step into the gracious, amazing, inheritance that we, as Christians, have already received. Hear the words again that the apostle Paul shares with us on this Pentecost and Confirmation Sunday.

He writes to the church in Rome: "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" (Rom. 8:15-17a).

Let just take a moment to unravel what Paul is really saying to us. First, we have received a spirit of adoption, not a spirit of fear. To me this means that we have been adopted into the family of God – chosen, accepted, and loved by God for who we are. God wants us to be part of God's family not because we deserve it, or have the right connections or the same DNA, but because of God's love for God's children. This love and acceptance by God invites us to live a life in courage and hope and confidence. God's acceptance invites us to live life unafraid – of the future, of what people may think of us, of our status, of our standing with God. Paul invites us instead to imagine a life of courage, living into the full measure of God's blessings and riches. That alone is huge, but there is more.

Secondly, not just have we been made part of God's family, but we have been "written into the will." We are not only children, but heirs of God, those destined to inherit all good things. And if that's not enough, we are not only heirs in general but co-heirs with Christ. Co-heirs!

God has deemed and called us worthy to receive all the inheritance and merit and reward and favor that God bestowed on Christ. This is amazingly good news, but has also the potential to make us revert back to being fearful – of not living up to God's expectation, or messing up along the way, or forgetting about God's great gifts to us and trying to make it through life on our own.

Today is the day of real good news - because God has provided us with the Holy Spirit to help us. God gave us the Holy Spirit to come along side us in times of anxiety to remind us that because we are children of God, we don't have to give in to fear.

The traditional story for Pentecost is found in Act 2. It depicts the disciples who had everything to fear and, indeed, had been nearly crippled by fear earlier. While hidden away in Jerusalem they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, a Spirit that encourages and equips them to go out into the marketplace and witness their faith in Christ. In doing so, they risk not simply having people think they were drunk, but perhaps also treasonous, deserving of the crucifixion that their leader had suffered. Yet emboldened by the Spirit they find their courage not simply to resist fear, but actually to step out in confidence and joy.

Again I ask the questions I raised in the beginning but a little differently in light of what we know now: What difference does it make for our life and our living knowing that we are God's beloved children, adopted and chosen and named coheir with Christ? What could it mean to live into this life we have been given with the Holy Spirit by our side?

It means that we don't have to live being afraid of all the uncertainties that this life brings but that we live this life with courage. And with great likelihood this means that we as beloved children of God live life counter-culturally. Listen up, confirmands, these are for you (and us):

Living with courage means that even when we see this world exploding left and right, we still work peace.

When we see people being treated unjustly, we help seek justice for them.

When we see people outside of the circle of God's love, we try our darndest to bring them in.

When we get a bad health diagnosis, we keep on fighting, until it is wiser to let go.

When we get depressed about climate change, we keep creating gardens, planting food, and doing our part to care for creation.

When everyone around us says "we can't," we go for it.

When people try to tell us that we are not good enough, or smart enough, or thin enough, or pretty enough, we know that we don't need their affirmation because we are accepted and loved by God the way we are, the way we were made.

Living with courage means that we don't give up or in, but still and always look for ways to be Christ's hands, feet, hearts and minds in this world.

It also means that we who have had more life and faith experience than our children and our confirmands model for them what it means to live with courage, sharing with them the times we have received strength and courage when life has thrown us a curve ball. The Spirit of God loves to work with and through community.

"You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption," Paul says. This is real good news.

Today we celebrate and give thanks to the Holy Spirit, the One who came and continues to come to remind us of God's love in Jesus, the One who comes amid all kinds of fears to remind us that the future is in God's hands, the One that calls us out of our places of fear in order to serve others in love, courage, and hope. Amen.