

Can you remember a time when you were a real brat? Come on now! Most of us adults can if we try hard enough; probably in our adolescence when we were constantly questioning our parents’ wisdom, decisions, and values. The 1960s were years when a “spirit of rebellion” dominated just about all of American society. Long hair, weird clothes, drugs, “flower power,” anything that opposed the spirit of the previous generation, was part of the 60s “spirit of rebellion.”

I suppose the 1960s were actually pretty tame compared to what happens today. But the spirit of the 1960s was very different from what preceded it. The “spirit of rebellion” took a new form. The word “*spirit*” is an interesting word because it usually needs to be followed by the word “of.” The word “*spirit*” appears nearly 700 times in the Bible and often times it is followed by the word “of.” In the Bible we read about the Spirit *of* the Lord; the spirit *of* power; the spirit *of* truth; the spirit *of* this world; the spirit *of* destruction; the spirit *of* holiness; the spirit *of* humility; the spirit *of* jealousy; the spirit *of* gentleness, etc. I think you get the point. There are three “*spirit of*” references in our Scripture for today in the eighth chapter of Romans: “*Spirit of God,*” “*spirit of slavery,*” and “*spirit of adoption.*”

“*Of*” is the little word connecting a descriptive noun with the preceding word, which, as we will see, is a very important connection. The word “*spirit*” by itself doesn’t tell us a great deal. In fact, when we mention “*spirit*” some people might be thinking of ghosts or the spirit world. For others a *spirit* means the bottled variety. Others may think of “team spirit” for their favorite team, or the “spirit of adventure,” or getting into the “spirit of Christmas.” Even in the Apostle Paul’s time, the word “*spirit*” needed some extra qualification. So, the second noun after the small word “*of*” becomes very important when we try to identify exactly what kind of spirit Paul is talking about.

We could ask a question of ourselves: What kind of spirit do we have? What follows the “*of*” in our lives? Do we have a spirit of fear, or a spirit of faith? A

spirit of hate, or a spirit of love? A spirit of inconsideration, or a spirit of helpfulness? A spirit of greed, or a spirit of generosity? A spirit of ruthlessness, or a spirit of gentleness? You can see how important the word that comes after “*of*” really is for the purpose of defining our individual spirits.

What a joy it is today to celebrate the Confirmation of eight students who have completed the Confirmation process here at Ken Mawr! We also come to celebrate the Day of Pentecost, on which the Holy Spirit came in a mighty rushing wind and in tongues of fire. He came and gave the disciples the ability to speak in different languages; to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to people in Jerusalem who had come from many nations. Indeed, the events of Pentecost are highly fantastic, the stuff that movie makers like because there is something very mysterious about it. Bethlehem is God **with** us, Calvary is God **for** us, and Pentecost is God **in** us.

When we were baptized, we were adopted by God and made part of his family, the church. When the waters of baptism touched our heads, our sinfulness was covered with the grace of God, a completely undeserved gift. And from that time on God has looked at us with baptismal expectation. God declares us forgiven in Christ when by grace through faith we put our trust in Jesus Christ. He makes us “*children of God.*” He makes us heirs of salvation and of eternal life, as Christ is God’s heir. Every day the Holy Spirit reminds us that we are loved by God. We are his children, his sons and daughters, even though we can hardly claim to be worthy of such an honor.

Daily, God’s Spirit leads us to Jesus, and enables us to recognize him through the eyes of faith, as our Savior, our Lord, and our Friend, someone to whom we can turn in our deepest need. Every day he shows us the terrible mess that sin is making in our lives; how much sin affects our relationship with God, harms so many people and destroys so much that is beautiful in this world. The Holy Spirit convinces us that we are sinners and convicts us of our sin. Through Word and Sacrament, the Bible and Communion, God revives us, renews us with the forgiveness that comes from the cross of Christ. The Holy Spirit is

busy every day of our lives guiding us to live as “*children of God.*” Everyday Satan and the world, and our own sinful desires, rebel against God and what he wants for our lives, and every day the Holy Spirit influences our minds and hearts, steers us away from evil and directs us to do what is good. We could say that we have been made holy through the blood of Jesus *because* the Spirit of God helps us to be “*children of God*” and, therefore, live lives of faithfulness. What a wonderful daily blessing the Holy Spirit is to each one of us!

The question that confronts us as we celebrate Pentecost today is this: Are we being “*led by the Spirit of God*” or by a “*spirit of slavery?*” Let’s not fool ourselves. We are children of this world. We are so easily caught up in the spirit of this world—a spirit of rebellion, a spirit of fear, a spirit of greed. Paul calls this “*a spirit of slavery*” because it has such a strong hold on us and will not let go, even though we wish to be released from it. Take the “spirit of fear.” Maybe you are about to face an operation or sit for an interview for an important job. Fear seizes your spirit; maybe even affects you bodily and fills your mind with all kinds of doubts about the future and all sorts of questions about your abilities and the wisdom of those you trust. When the heat is on, we would do anything to be free of this fear. We actually become a slave to fear.

Or take greed. We all have this spirit ingrained within us that wants more and more—and we are all bombarded every day with messages that reinforce a “spirit of greed.” We know that we ought to be generous, but we cannot let it go, no matter how good the cause might be, or how desperate the need may be. We will always think of a justification for why we can’t be generous. We envy those who get so much praise for the way they give generously of their time and energy and resources. “Why can’t we be that generous?” we ask. The answer is: We are caught in a “*spirit of slavery.*” Slavery to greed.

There are things that ordinary people like you and me can easily become enslaved to. We can let the spirit of immorality, lust, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, and the like, rule our lives and ruin our relationships with God and with the people we love. But there is a stark contrast to the “*spirit of slavery*” and

that is the “*spirit of adoption.*” It is the Holy Spirit who changes us so that more and more we turn away from the “*spirit of slavery*” and the sin that entraps us. The Holy Spirit points us to the love of Jesus and guides us to demonstrate the same qualities that Jesus showed while he was on this earth. If we have received “*the Spirit of adoption,*” clearly, we are led by the Spirit and by “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,*” the fruit of the Spirit evident in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23).

British athlete Derek Redmond ran in a semi-final qualifier for the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Halfway round the track he collapsed with a torn hamstring. For some strange reason, Redmond wanted to finish the race, so he struggled to his feet. Derek’s father left his seat in the stands, and he made his way through security gates. His dad picked up his crying son, and together they finished the race.

Derek’s dad did what the Holy Spirit does for us. It’s when we are spiritually exhausted, when we find ourselves giving in to the “*spirit of slavery,*” when we can’t pray, when we just don’t want to pray, or when our faith is just not strong enough, and there’s no way under the sun we can finish the race. That’s when the Holy Spirit picks us up and carries us across the finish line.

When we don’t feel like “*children of God,*” let’s remind one another that we have divine help. God’s Holy Spirit is our Advocate and Helper, our Counselor and Encourager, who comes to our aid when we seem to be losing the fight. Thank God we have the Holy Spirit who continually points us to Jesus, our Savior! When we come here to worship, joining with the church of all the ages and all the nations, we are reminded of the love of God, the grace of Jesus the Son and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. When the benediction is given, we are sent out to face whatever each week holds for us, confident in the promises of God and strengthened by his Holy Spirit to do what he has called us to do. Please pray with me: *Lord, send your Spirit upon each of us today. Help us in our weakness. Make us your children. And bring us to eternal life. Amen.*

(Thanks to Pastor Vince Gerhardy for sermon ideas)