

## Based on Romans 8:12-17

### Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

*Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – 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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 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-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

One of the most common utterances in the scriptures, from God, from Jesus, from the angels and from prophets is; “Do not be afraid.” And here in this passage, St. Paul is conveying the same idea when he writes, “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.” The Israelite authors of the Hebrew scriptures (our Old Testament) often spoke of the “fear of the Lord,” but what they were talking about is something like respect.

The fear of the Lord is akin to a fear of water; both are life giving, but both also encompass incredible and potentially dangerous power. It is wise to be cautious around water lest it drown you or wash you away to your doom. It is at least equally wise to be mindful of God’s will.

But that’s not the kind of fear we’re talking about here. We’re talking about the other kind, the hair-rising-on-your-neck, muscle-freezing kind of fear. The kind of fear that triggers your flight-or-fight response. Because while the fear of the Lord brings you to a respect of your won limits and the magnificence of God’s power, just being afraid often leads us away from God.

Now, fear can be useful. It allowed our very ancient ancestors to avoid being killed by a saber-toothed cat or giant cave bear. Nowadays, it keeps us from doing stupidly risky things or endangering others. But oftentimes we find ourselves worrying because we are afraid of things that aren’t true existential threats – as in things that might embarrass or shame us, but which wouldn’t actually kill us.

Those kinds of fears too often give too much power to others and sometimes it leads us to dark places where the actions we’re willing to take to either avoid shame or to cover it up tempt us into making very harmful decisions.

In Christ, we are shown what it is to live and to love without fear. Jesus doesn't let the opinions of others dictate who he should be kind to or generous to. He doesn't let the letter of the Law keep him from responding to peoples' genuine needs. Jesus walks through the world without fear because he is confident in the love of God.

In faith, we too can walk through the world without fear and respond to the world's needs and wounds with generous and bold loving action. Knowing that we too, through Christ, possess the love of God should free us from our unnecessary fears so that like Christ we can begin mending what is broken in the world around us, bring light to what is in darkness, and offer hope even in the moments of darkest despair.

Do not be afraid, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.