

Sermon on 15th May 2016

Roman 8, 14 – 17

Pentecost is the least understood of all Christian festivals.

Half of the population in Germany does not know the meaning of Pentecost and I wonder if the number would be higher either in Great Britain or in the Netherlands.

During the children's talk Gilles allowed us to experience, how it sound when more than one language is spoken at the same time.

Was it this the people heard that morning in Jerusalem?

We don't know. However we have major troubles dealing with the Holy Spirit. Who is that? What is he doing? What has he to do with us?

We have a clear image of what Jesus did doing. We see him in Galilee we hear him talking to men and women. We learn about his healing and kindness.

We have some ideas about God's involvement in creation and his dealing with his people after they left Egypt.

But the Holy spirit seems to be difficult to grasp.

He is mentioned 10 times in the old testament, 30 times in the gospels, 42 times in Acts, 13 times in the letters of Paul and 9 times in the rest of the bible. But I wonder if this statistic gives any clue.

The epistle text for today might help us with our questions about the holy Spirit and his dealings with us.

In the text we read about a radical intimate relationship between mankind and God.

The creator of the universe **fathers** an individual average person

living on the surface of a tiny rock circling around an average sun on the outskirts of an average galaxy. Just one amongst 100 to 200 billion galaxies in the universe.

Really a radical intimate relationship: The creator of the universe **fathers** an individual average person.

Our struggle with this image lies in the fact, that we are blind to both aspects of this promise: Number one: the immensity of our Lord and number two: his continuing will to have a relationship and friendship with us individually as close as have family members.

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

The word “led” here is the translation of the Greek word agō; this is a primary verb; it means verbally to lead; and means by implication: to move someone until a destination is reached.

The Spirit of God wants to become the driving force in the life of the followers of Jesus Christ. This was the case back then during the first Pentecost and is also true today on the 15th May 2016.

So what leads us now? What drives us out of bed on Monday morning? What drives us to work, to business, in relations, in talking or doing? What demands our energy, what keeps us occupied, what is always on our minds?

What drives us quite often is **fear**. When we are honest about the reasons for our actions very often we find fear at the core of our motivation. We are afraid about the loss of reputation, loss of status or loss of power. We seek security behind our masks and keep up appearances. What would the others think of us, if they only knew? We are driven by the need to prove to others, that we are someone. We need relationships but at the same moment we are afraid of exposing our self or being vulnerable.

And we have good reason for this, because this world is a dangerous place.

“Eat or be eaten!” That is the call of the day. “Survival of the fittest” Spit on any so called “looser”. We see this concept in action when we dig for example into the publications associated with the so called “Panama Papers”. “The winner takes it all!” This sounds strong but at the core of this statement lies again the fear not to “make” it, not to win but to fail.

In our search for safety we grab our money and put it into insurance policies. We prepare for any kind of insecurity.

When we focus our energy on protecting ourselves we may actually miss out on life.

Why is that?

We become the slave of whatever or whoever we look to for our sense of self-worth. If you want some examples? Here they are: The one who overworks, because she has only a sense of value when she is either busy or exhausted. The second who is over worried, because only if he is in constant crisis might others help out and only then might they stay in a relationship. The third who tries to keep peace and to please all because conflicts between those around her would kill her.

But neither working or carefulness nor kindness in itself is bad. Those are good habits. They become bad if they are blown up out of proportion. So even the best motivations and forces can destroy us in the end if we look here for security.

But where is security for us frightened ones?

Jesus died for everything that enslaved us. He carried our shortcomings and everything we have broken. He took all we failed to do and all we did wrong on himself. That feast we call Good Friday.

Jesus rose from the grave. He broke the bondage of death and we are granted life from the Father in heaven by Jesus’ deed. Here the power of death as the final word is broken. God’s Life breaks way.

That feast we call Easter.

The reason why we are allowed in as followers of Jesus Christ is mere grace. We did not earn it, it is given to us.

As I said before: We are blind to God's continuing will to have a relationship and friendship with us as close as have family members.

Quoting Paul: "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."

In our days adoption can have a negative connotation to some of us. Like a second class member of the family. The unwanted may be tolerated but not really allowed in. In Jesus' time adoption gave you exactly the same status as the borne members of the family. But in both situations adoption happens to you, you cannot adopt yourself to someone. You are chosen.

So what this text says is nothing less than everyone who accepts the grace given on Good Friday and Easter day becomes family to Jesus.

He is our brother. God wants really to be our Father. We are chosen, not by our doing, but by grace, free to us, because Jesus paid the price. God bled to death for us.

Sometimes our experiences with our fathers here on earth stand in the way of the understanding of what that could mean: **God is my loving daddy.**

But God himself can deal with this. He wants to heal our wounds from inside out. And he brings this into action, by pouring his spirit into our hearts.

Quoting Paul: "When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we **are** children of God." The adopted child of God receives a new motivation, a new drive in life: not fear or bondage but the freedom to walk the path God has laid

for them in trust with the creator of the universe.

When you are a child, you think: Wait until I **am** grown up, then I will do this or that. The time passes by and you may notice that you are never **done** growing up. With my 47 years now it still seems to be a long way. Years ago (at that time I was 19 years old) I decided to walk my life following Jesus. In the beginning I thought: when I have read the bible once, then I will know how to handle this. But guess what: day by day I learn that the more I try to hold on to control my life, the more I realize, that I completely depend on my father in heaven during every step I make on his hand walking a way I do not see until the end.

The next verse in our text might scare us: “if, in fact, we suffer with Christ so that we may also be glorified with Christ”

By no means this point to any way where we earn our salvation. We cannot contribute to God’s gift.

On the other hand, nowhere is it written: your life will be easy ... No verse in the bible says so, although we would love it this way. Suffering is part of life on earth. Your influence is limited; the majority of things you might want to happen are beyond your reach. Just try to make one hair of your head brown or white as an act of your will (and I am not talking about going to the hairdresser!) We all know hardships are part of life on earth. But nobody likes to suffer. This is part of our deepest fear. We run away from suffering as far as possible and we try to take any precaution possible to avoid it. But Jesus reacted differently to suffering. The Son of God was willing to suffer for us, out of his love for us. The Holy Spirit will teach us, to walk the path laid out for us, even with the suffering included. The reason for this is: Through the suffering shines God’s love. I do not say this light-heartedly: Pain hurts and you would love to escape it.

One person of the old testament who is to me an example of the truth, that God can work through suffering is Joseph the son of Jacob.

If you want any details you find them in Genesis chapters 37 and 39 until 50.

Just to give you an idea: He is borne youngest of 10 brothers being his father's favourite. He has this creasy dreams about his family bowing before him. From here on things go downhill for Joseph. His brothers plot to kill him but agree to sell him instead into slavery in Egypt. They do this just to get rid of him. Here he works in a wealthy man's home. He gains his masters trust. So he becomes the steward of the household. Only to become the object of lust for his mistress. When he resists her attempt to seduce him he is thrown into prison. Here he gains the trust of the main guard. And again he becomes a kind of a steward to the prison inmates. In this situation God allows him to correctly predict the future of two fellow inmates. And after this another two years pass by without anything happening.

Imagine we interview Joseph at this moment about his life and what he expects from the future. What would be his answer? Maybe he says this: "As a young boy I was full of dreams. Now I sit in this prison without any hope of freedom in the future." So far so true. But we also read that Josef did rise to the highest rank in Egypt. We read also that God gave him the heart to forgive his brothers. God formed Josef into the man **He** had in mind by leading him on his way.

Be aware: Jesus on the cross at Good Friday is the same Jesus that greeted his friends on Easter.

If we want to be really free from bondage and free to become what God created in us as a gift to our fellow Christians and to the world around us then let us welcome the Spirit of God: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.