

The Sixth Sunday of Pentecost  
July 16, 2017

Text: Romans 8:12-17

Theme: "Father!" A Trusting Cry!

"Daddy, I can't sleep." "Daddy, I need a glass of water." "Daddy, I'm scared." You say these are usually Mommy cries? Often, yes, but they can be for Daddy. Such a cry is a cry in need and in trust. Then there is the cry of "Uncle!" This cry means you have given up, have had enough. So why is it "uncle" and not "cuz" or "auntie?" I don't know. You'll have to Google it to find out and you may still not, may even cry, "Uncle," in your search.

In our text for today Paul speaks of the cry of "Daddy," or it's Aramaic equivalent, "Abba," and then he quickly adds the Greek work for his readers, "Pater," "Father." Both father and uncle are cries in hopes of relief. The one is in trust to the one you trust, the other only in despair to one who wants to dominate, a cry that may bring momentary relief but from one who sees such a cry as evidence of his domination.

Is "Abba, Father," our cry? It is not one we voice on our own. It is a supernatural cry.

Romans 8 begins with a liberating cry, some good news after some very disheartening reality. Paul has been speaking of the seeming losing battle against sin. He had said he knows that nothing good dwells in him, that is, in his flesh. "For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." (Romans 7:18) We also hear, "For I find it to be a

law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand...I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.” (Romans 7:23) But then chapter 8 begins, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2) Despite all the failures the assurance of no condemnation is given. It is because there is deliverance through Jesus. He was put to death for our transgressions and raised for our justification (Romans 4:25) He took the condemnation of the law in our place. His resurrection is proof that his life and death are a sufficient and complete atonement, death now has no hold on Him. We too will live with Him forever. We do live for Him now.

This walk after Him is a whole new world. Where there was no faith there was really no struggle against sin, no success. We were completely captive to sin and our flesh was no help, no, part of the problem. But reborn in Christ there is now struggle against evil, a struggle that continues until the time when there is no more evil in us or around us, only good. But right now, yes, we do struggle. We read in verses 9 – 10, “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you...But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” The Paul tells us in our text, “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.” (vs 13) So if now you want to give up the no condemnation part, just go the way of the flesh

and condemnation and damnation will be yours. You can take full credit for it. You've earned it. But say no to the deeds of the body and you are saying yes to life, life that you don't have coming to you. We haven't earned it. Christ has and He freely gives.

But, yes, a struggle, not easy. There are a lot of splinters or thorns. There are the thorns of the flesh, the world around us and of the devil. The flesh is pretty sensitive, the pricks of thorns or splinters, well, no thank you, but the a little touch and a little massage, and yes, more please. The world around us has lots of thorns that can sap our energy. Jesus speaks of the seed that falls among the thorns in our lesson from Matthew 13 today. He says, "This is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22) Cares and worries could lead us to strictly human solutions. We could fear we won't have enough and be consumed with work to meet our needs and wants that have become needs. We may think we have no time for sinking roots into the soil of God's Word, no hunger for coming to the Lord's Supper. Maybe there is a thorny issue out there that calls for a little dishonesty, deceit of deception on our part. We are tempted to think that a sin infection can be solved with the application of more sin.

What is on the outside appeals, gives opportunity to what is on the inside, the sinful flesh. The flesh wants to take the good and use it in a bad way be that the goods made from the bounty of creation, sex, smarts, pleasant personality, athletic ability, even biblical knowledge. This bad way

is “have it my way,” self-centered. This is living according to the flesh. It makes one stick out in the body of Christ like a sore thumb for that is exactly what we are following sin, thumbs infected with the barbed thorn of arrogance.

The flesh does not take pleasure in suffering, nor should it, but the flesh would also move away from Christ to avoid suffering almost at all costs. Physical suffering does come to dying bodies (which we all have) in this crying creation. It can be self-inflicted from bad stewardship of our health, and it can be just part of life in this place of decay. We may find ourselves (do find ourselves) in situations we had not planned for. The treatment is not working. The recovery is oh, oh, so slow. It just doesn't seem fair. Why, God, why is this happening to me or why does my loved one have to go through this.

The thorns and splinters are penetrating and deep, even devilish. We know Paul's experience with the thorn in the flesh, this thorn which he calls a messenger of Satan to box him around (2 Corinthians 12:7) Yes, the devil is walking around as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He does throw those thorns of flaming darts (Ephesians 6:16)

The devil, the world, our flesh, is a trifold splinter attack. It is the tempter making use of the world oozing with temptation to appeal to the flesh bent toward temptation.

It all can make the forbidden look to be desired and the commanded to be rejected. Do this wrong and it will be good. You will be a better man because of it. Yes, defy the Divine and deify the damned.

It's hard, almost to the point of not being able to take it. If you are there you are not the first believer to be in that place. Think of Job, or Jeremiah, or Isaiah. Job faced this affliction of the flesh and the thorns in the flesh called friends. Jeremiah and Isaiah preached to people who often preferred false hope to the call to repentance. It appeared the seed was sown and no fruit forth coming.

Yes, times when it doesn't seem to be working. Is it all worth it? Is it time to pull these things out, give in to sin, even embrace it. Maybe if we don't speak of the faith or not put it into action there will be less pain. "I can't take it anymore, Uncle!" But remember, this is one ugly uncle. He delights to snatch the word away. He is happy when our interest is pricked by the word, but then no roots are put down. He is eager to see fruitfulness choked off by thorns.

But "uncle" is the path of death. Our cry is, "Abba, Father." This phrase appears three times in the New Testament. Paul uses it here and in Galatians 4:6, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father." The other time is from the lips of Jesus Himself, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36) But the Father's will was not to remove the cup. No, His will was for the Son to drink the cup to the last drop, to make Him a sin offering for all.

Jesus faced all the thorns of temptation from the world and the devil that we do. He never fell, never cried "Uncle." He bore the thorns of

torture topped off with that crown of thorns. He was despised and rejected. In the midst of that suffering He cries out to the Father, a cry that goes unheeded. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!” There He is enduring the thorns of hell for us. The Father did not answer. It was as prophesied as Jesus was being made sin for us who knew no sin.

But then when the offering was complete, after the cry of, “It is finished,” it is “Father,” once more, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46) He gave up the spirit and He breathed His last. But it would not be His last breath. He lives. Paul tells us Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:4) Paul says, addressing baptized believers, “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, “Abba, Father.” (vs 15) He tells us the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs. (vss 16, 17) We who have been baptized have been baptized into Christ, buried into His death and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-4) The Spirit was poured out on us to come dwell in us (Acts 2:38, 1 Corinthians 6:19) We are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, as many has have been baptized have put on Christ and are now Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promises. (Galatians 3:26-29)

We been called from death to life, called to life of fruitfulness, called by the One who promises fruit. “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah

55:11) Isaiah promises one day the thorn will give way to the cypress and the brier to the myrtle (Isaiah 11:13) Paul says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:16)

There is some pain, maybe a lot, here below. Paul reminds us we are heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him, in order that we may also be glorified with Him.” (vs 17)

No, not the cry of “Uncle,” that’s only the cry of death. We cry, “Father,” the cry of life now and forever. For Jesus’ sake. Amen