

## Fear or Faith

By Linda Rex

**May 26, 2024—Holy Trinity / After Pentecost**—One of the things I've noticed lately has been how often our decisions, our behavior, and our attitudes are governed by fear. Often, when I ask someone what they are afraid of, they completely deny that there is any fear involved at all. They deny that fear has anything to do with why they are acting a certain way or saying particular things, even though it is obvious to others that they are afraid.

In our New Testament reading for Holy Trinity Sunday, Romans 8:12–17, the apostle Paul points out the difference between slavery and sonship. He says that a spirit of slavery has its basis in fear, whereas, a spirit of sonship is based in love. What God has given us through Christ in the Spirit is a participation in the love of Father, Son, and Spirit. This means there is no reason for us to be afraid or to have a sense of fear in regards to God.

But often, the way in which we live our lives and make our decisions is rooted in fear. Because we do not know God well and trust him in every circumstance, we find ourselves immobilized, unable to courageously move forward. Or, we sense a thousand and one reasons why everything is going to go wrong or has gone awry, because we simply cannot believe that God is present, real, and loves us unconditionally, completely, and ceaselessly.

Our response as a result of fear rather than of faith often looks more like slavery than love. Indeed, when we are fearful, we tend to gravitate towards actions and words that will give us a feeling of control or mastery in the situation. We create rules or expectations or standards by which we measure our standing. We assess whether or not we are safe or are okay in our relationships with God or others. When taken to its worst end, fear blinds us to the reality of God's love and grace, preventing us from living and walking in the truth of who we are as God's beloved children. Indeed, fear often drives our responses, and its ultimate affect is destructive and unhealthy for us, creating division, pain, death, and isolation in our relationships. And this is not God's desire for us.

If we sense fear within ourselves or realize that our decisions and how we are responding to situations is being driven by fear, we need to reconsider where we stand in relation to our Triune God. It takes a measure of humility and self-awareness to admit that perhaps we are driven by fear rather than living out of a heart filled with the love of God in Christ by the Spirit. Are we willing to admit that we are responding out of fear rather than simply trusting in our loving, gracious God?

How well do we know our God who is Father, Son, and Spirit? It is our God who is love, living in our hearts, who drives out the fear which seeks to take up residence within. In our life today, our hearts may be given over to fear or given over to love—we have both at work in our human flesh right now. But the apostle Paul says that we have no obligation to live in fear or to allow fear to be the driving force within. One day fear will be removed forever, but meanwhile, suffering will occur and fear will challenge our trust in our Triune God.

Indeed, we are new creations. We have been given God's Spirit, the presence of God living in us, filling us with his love. We have no obligation to the deeds of death. Rather, we are bound by the Spirit to live and walk in love, for this is the truth of who we are as image-bearers of Christ. It is Jesus' life in us by the Spirit which motivates us. God's love poured out on and in us in the Spirit pours out from us to those around us. In this place of divine love and grace, there is no room left for fear. This is why we turn to Jesus, and open ourselves to the Holy Spirit. God's perfect love casts out our fear and gives us faith.

The Holy Spirit, given to us by Jesus from the Father, binds our hearts and our spirits with God, uniting us and making us one. In the Spirit, resonating within us, is the affection between the Father and the Son, as we hear within our heart Jesus' own "Abba, Father." In this safe place, held in God's love and life, we are free from fear. We rest our head on the chest of our loving Father, and feel the loving arms of our Lord Jesus, and the kiss of the Spirit on our cheek. In the embrace of the holy Trinity, there is no room left for fear.

*Dearest Father, Jesus, Spirit, thank you for wrapping us in your warm embrace of love and grace. Enable us to see and confess our fear, to turn towards you in faith, and to allow you to fill us with your perfect love. Grant us the grace to rest in your grace and love, through Jesus and by your Spirit. Amen.*

*"So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."*  
Romans 8:12–17 NASB

*"We owe flesh nothing. In the light of all this, to now continue to live under the sinful influences of the senses, is to reinstate the dominion of spiritual death. Instead, we are indebted to now exhibit the highest expression of life inspired by the Spirit. This life demonstrates zero tolerance to the habits and sinful patterns of the flesh. The original life of the Father revealed in his Son is the life the Spirit now conducts within us. Slavery is such a poor substitute for sonship. They are opposites; the one leads forcefully through fear while sonship responds fondly to Abba Father. We are not slaves to a cruel taskmaster but gifted with the spirit of sonship; engaging the tender affection of Papa without any reserve. Holy Spirit personally entwines our spirit; resonating ceaselessly within, endorsing Abba's parenthood. The fact that we are God's offspring, certainly also means that we are equal heirs of God. Not only is God our portion, but we are his. We are co-heirs in Christ. So, whatever we may suffer, at any time could separate us from our inclusion in his sufferings. Thus, every reminder of this mystery, also reinforces the fact that we have been made equal participants in the glory of his resurrection."* Romans 8:12–17 Mirror Bible