

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity
Romans 8:12-17: "Who Is in Your Spiritual Driver's Seat?"
August 1/2, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Send, we humbly ask You, Almighty God, Your Holy Spirit into our hearts, that He may rule and direct us according to Your will; comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth, that we, being steadfast in the faith, may increase in love and in all good works, and in the end obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 123)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the eighth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

So then, brothers, 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 sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whom we follow by the power of the Holy Spirit on the way of salvation and life, dear fellow redeemed:

How do you rate yourself as a driver? I consider myself a pretty good driver, and I imagine that many of you do too. At the same time, I would be reluctant to put a "How's My Driving?" bumper sticker on my car with my employer's phone number on it. I might think I'm a good driver, but I'm not a perfect one. When my driving hasn't been so good, I prefer to stay anonymous.

It is probably easier to identify the bad driving around us than to admit our own bad habits on the road. We get annoyed when people drive too fast, follow too closely, pull out in front of us, or weave from side to side while using their cellphones. But all of us have probably done the same at one point or another. We have been distracted while driving, we have been overconfident, impatient toward others, and angry.

These same things that cause bad driving are also problems in our spiritual life. Take distractions. Drivers can be distracted by a lot of things—other people in the car, loud music, and the main culprit: cellphones. They forget their primary purpose, their most important

mission, which is to safely navigate their vehicle from point A to point B at speeds typically higher than most land animals can run. Driving is inherently risky.

There is risk in our spiritual life, too, though we don't always realize it. A driver can take his safety for granted and let his guard down, just as we can take our faith for granted and let our guard down. There are lots of distractions in our spiritual life. The devil, the world, and our own flesh want us to forget our goal; they want to sidetrack us from our journey to heaven. "Turn off here!" they say. "You'll have plenty of time to get back on the main road. Check out this attraction! Drop your money on this! Do whatever you want to!" And the more we indulge the sinful desires of our flesh, the less we think about where we were going in the first place.

Distractions to our faith are closely connected to overconfidence in faith. We think our faith is invincible. We think we could not fall away from believing in Jesus. We think we can handle whatever challenges come our way. This is like the driver who thinks he knows the road so well, he could navigate it in his sleep. A high percentage of car accidents happen within a couple miles of home because people are less attentive. Temptations to sin also happen in those places where we think we are in good control of everything, places like home, work, and church.

Along with distractions and overconfidence, our spiritual life is harmed by impatience. The impatient driver puts himself and others at risk. He doesn't see things clearly. All he can think of is his own plans, and he resents anyone who slows him down or gets in the way. This is how we can become toward God when His plans for us do not align with our plan. We want Him to help us and fix our problems and pains *right now*. When He doesn't, we become resentful. We complain to Him and others. We wear ourselves thin with worry instead of giving over our troubles to Him in prayer.

The impatient driver is very likely to become an angry driver. He views the drivers around him differently than he views himself. They are the enemy. They are purposely trying to provoke him. He doesn't see them as those who make mistakes, or as those who might be dealing with worse distractions and troubles than he is. This happens to Christians too. They pin the blame for their sin and unhappiness on others. They do not acknowledge their own faults. They do not seek to forgive. They hold grudges. They condemn. They seek to inflict the harm on others that they feel has been done to them.

All these things have affected our spiritual life in the past—distractions, overconfidence, impatience, and anger—and to some degree they are affecting us even now in the present. We are sinners. We don't do everything right. We do and say and think a lot of things wrong. Really we are bad drivers. We do not belong in the spiritual driver's seat. If that's how we think we will get to our destination, we are certainly headed for a crash.

Well then who needs to drive? There are many who play a role in your spiritual life. Your parents, siblings, spouse, and children do. Your pastor and teachers do. Your fellow Christians do. But they are not in the driver's seat. They are just as impaired by sin as you are. The one who drives your faith, who keeps you focused and moving in the right direction, is God the Holy Spirit.

In the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, we confess that "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." You cannot bring yourself to faith in Jesus. You cannot navigate yourself from point A in this world to point B in heaven. But the Holy Spirit can and does. The way He does this is through the means of grace, the Holy Word and Sacraments. He "has called [you] by the Gospel, enlightened [you] with His gifts, sanctified and kept [you] in the true faith."

This is the work of the Spirit that the apostle Paul describes in today's text. He writes that the Holy Spirit brings us life. He has made us "*sons of God*" through spiritual adoption, and He leads us to recognize and call on God as our dear Father. He "*bears witness with our spirit*" that as "*children of God*" we are His heirs "*and fellow heirs with Christ.*" He brings us through suffering with Christ to glory with Christ.

By nature, we were driving ourselves to destruction. We were on the "highway to hell," and that's nothing to sing about. But the Holy Spirit turned us around. He changed our direction completely. He brought us out of the darkness of sin and death and into the light of Jesus. He opened our eyes through the Law to see all the damage we had inflicted on ourselves and others by our sin. And He showed us how all those sins, all that damage, was taken away by the innocent suffering and death of God's only Son.

Jesus willingly accepted the countless blemishes on your driving record. He took responsibility for all the damages caused. He offered to cover what for you was an unpayable fine. He gave Himself to be punished for your sins of distraction, overconfidence, impatience, and anger. He paid the price for your sins by pouring out His own holy blood in death. Because of what He did, all those sins, all those serious, death-deserving infractions, are forgiven. In Him, your driving record is clean. Covered in His righteousness, the scratches, gouges, and corrosion of your sins do not show anymore.

The Holy Spirit's work is to continue to call and compel and drive you to Jesus. He wants to lead you each day to hear the Gospel of Jesus' grace, His own Word of Absolution. That powerful message of forgiveness reminds you that you are not on your own. You do not have to navigate your own way through this life. You are a child of God the Father because the Holy Spirit has caused you to believe in His only-begotten Son.

Your trust in Jesus means that God the Father now looks at you no differently than He looks upon His holy Son. That is why we are specifically called "*sons of God*" in today's text. You and I have been joined to Jesus by faith. This means we possess everything He possesses. We live as He lives. We inherit what He inherits. It also means that we must suffer as He suffers.

He suffers by not receiving the devotion and honor that are His due. He suffers by watching so many people drive themselves away from Him and His grace. He suffers when they follow false prophets instead of His pure Word (Mat. 7:15-20), when they trust in their own efforts and actions to save themselves (vv. 21-23), when they choose "*the cares and riches and pleasures of life*" over Him (Luk. 8:14).

We suffer with Him when people make fun of us for not joining them in their misdeeds. We suffer when they ridicule our beliefs and our humble trust in God. We suffer when they reject

the Word of God in favor of worldly wisdom and do everything in their power to make us deny the truth we hold so dear. A great many are driving on the wide path that *"leads to destruction"* (Mat. 7:13). In their eyes, we followers of Jesus are going the wrong way and need to be turned around. Our going against the grain of the world causes great difficulties for us. Jesus already warned us that *"the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life"* (v. 14).

So life in this fallen world is hardly a "joy ride." There are many bumps in the road. There is danger in all directions. But you are not in the driver's seat. The Holy Spirit is, and He knows the way you must go. He daily drives you to repentance for your sins, to *"put to death the deeds of the body,"* so that you are not led in the wrong direction. And He drives you always toward Jesus, so that you go forward in His light and are comforted in His grace and peace as you travel along the way.

With the Holy Spirit doing the driving through the powerful Word, you will remain in the Lord's loving care and will be brought safely through suffering to your glorious destination.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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