

Thursday of Lent V - Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

The world is gripped by fear. Fear also has a hold on me and you. But Paul's words loosen that grip and free us from its control today. Before we can hear those words, however, we need to address another fear which often seizes people when they read this passage. Did you notice the word "If" in the final paragraph of our reading today? It shows up three times. "If the Spirit of God dwells in you...if Christ is in you...If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus dwells in you..." It sounds like Paul is not sure. Should I be questioning these things? Here is one of the reasons why Pastors need to study the languages in which the Bible is written. Greek uses the word "if" in many ways. These are what I like to call "evidence ifs." Imagine me pointing at the water on the window and saying, "If the windows are wet, it's raining." The question is not whether windows are wet. Paul is not calling into question whether the Spirit or Christ or God dwells in you. He is pointing to the Spirit's presence and drawing conclusions much like I might point to wet windows and conclude that it rained. I find it easier to sometimes to substitute the word "since" when I am reading these verses: "Since in fact the Spirit of Christ dwells in you." I think that gets a little closer in English to the way we might say what he means.

Now we can hear the fear-smashing words of Paul. There is no condemnation for us. Since the Spirit of God dwells in us we are no longer in that flesh which has been incapacitated by sin. We are in the Spirit. That Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also restore life to your mortal body. Death no longer has its grip on us.

For Christians that means we no longer fear death. And without the grip of fear, we can lead our lives in service to Christ liberated from the mandates of fear. It no longer gets to call the shots. I may shelter in place, but I do this to spare my vulnerable neighbor. I may invest in my retirement accounts, but it is not because I am afraid of poverty, but because Christ has entrusted me with resources, and I will use them well. Own the decisions you make today. You have been liberated from the fear of death and all that Satan can throw at you. I can serve Christ today. I know the end of this story, and he has promised me life.

God be with you until we meet again. In Jesus' love and mercy, Pastor Wulf