

Eager Life in the Spirit!

✠ **Fear gone with “Abba!” (vv.11-15)**

✠ **Suffering shared to glory (vv.16-19)**

In the name of Jesus, our suffering, yet glorified Savior, dearly redeemed children of God:

Thinking of **Eager Life in the Spirit**, I remember a little boy who kept coming home from First Grade not at all eager. “Mom, why do I have to go to school? It’s so easy!” But when she saw his first report card with bad grades, his mother scolded him: “If you were doing your best, I would be satisfied. But since you can do better, you need to work much harder. No more report cards like this.”

Years later, the same student after many years of high grades, received his last sermon at the Seminary with a note: “Rewrite. See me after class.” The good professor said, “I assigned you a festival text in order for you to show the class a model festival sermon. You wrote this for any week of the year. It’s obvious you only did this to get it done; you did not do your best. Today you will go back through all the steps of sermon writing which you have missed, and do what you should have done in the first place.”

“Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.” (Psalm 25:7) My sinful nature always wants to be lazy. God always wants me to serve Him in holy joy. Today as a gift of His grace God gives us **Eager Life in the Spirit!**

✠ **Fear gone with “Abba!” (vv.11-15)**

New life in Christ is a life of eager anticipation. No matter how rotten things may seem today, if you believe in Jesus as your Savior, then God has you on the pathway to heaven. There all the longings of our hearts will be satisfied by His awesome and eternal glory. Our sin is that we want God’s heavenly glory now! So we keep falling into the sins of eating too much, drinking too much, or looking too hard for entertainment instead of seeking the Lord in His holy Word. Or we try to get the praise of people even if God is not pleased. Our problem is that this sinful flesh can never be satisfied. Hollywood proves it again and again. The richest, most beautiful people in the world, with all the fame and glory this life can offer are some of the most shattered and miserable people alive. Their therapists keep letting them talk and talk and talk, but no one ever reaches the point of contentment that says, “I have enough.” Why should this surprise us? In the Bible King Solomon got everything the human heart desires, but in the end he concluded: **“All is vanity, a meaningless chasing after the wind.”** (Ecclesiastes 1:14)

What God wants us to realize is that following our sinful nature does not end in therapy, but in hell, i.e., eternal death. Judas chose money over Christ and ended up spilling his insides all over a hillside in a ghastly, poorly executed suicide. But then again, our first parents Adam and Eve, would have done the same if God had not called them to repentance with the announcement of the Savior to come, the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head. Lent is a good time for us to stop and see how the cravings of our sinful nature, the desires and wants of this body, are so evil that to get rid of them took the blood of God’s own Son. Sinful desires can only produce guilty fear, and finally death in hell without end.

But we thank God that He raised Jesus from the dead. And with that same power God has raised our sin-dead souls to new life in Christ. He brought to life inside of every Christian a new man to battle daily with that old sinful nature so hell-bent on self-destruction. We can look forward to the day when God will raise our bodies from the grave and fill these arms and legs, this head and heart with the new and eternal vitality that cannot die. All the effects of sin will be gone – **“no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”** (Revelation 21:4) **Fear** will be completely gone because of something very wonderful that God the Holy Spirit has taught us pray.

By using the tools of His Word and sacraments, the dear Holy Spirit has invaded the dark cave of our human hearts. Formerly, fear and sadness kept filling every corner even if there might be a brief flicker of happiness every now and then. But now the Holy Spirit has shined the light of God's grace and forgiveness into this tiny hole and filled it with brightness and joy. He did not do this in order to terrify us again or send us scurrying like bugs to escape the light. With all our sins washed away by the blood of Christ, with His own righteous robes covering our sinful nakedness in our Baptism, we have a whole new life to live, the **Eager Life in the Spirit!** *“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”* We have been adopted into God's family where the lights are always on in joyful celebration.

God shows this in what Dr. Martin Luther called a most perfect prayer: *“Abba, Father.”* That word *“Abba”* is an Aramaic word that means something like “Daddy” in English. The best illustration of *“Abba”* I've heard came from something Pastor Verne Voss saw on one of his many trips to Israel. Running across the sand along the Mediterranean seashore was an Israeli man with his son on his back. Laughing with delight, the little boy kept calling out, *“Abba! Abba! Abba!”* Knowing God our Father as *“Abba,”* we don't even need to know the words to pray when we are too distressed to think. In His strong arms we can lay our heads upon His shoulder and cry, *“Abba, Father.”* That is enough. Our dear Father in heaven will take care of the rest, including His deep desire to get us safely home to heaven.

Suffering shared to glory (vv.16-19)

But how do you know whether you have faith? And if you do, is your faith strong enough? *“The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”* He *testifies* in sermons like this one. For instance, two men needed to take a plane ride. The first one got on gladly and thoroughly enjoyed the flight. The other had to be convinced by his friends that it is safe to fly. But even on the plane he sat white knuckled, gripping the armrests and hardly able to breathe. Which one reached his destination? Answer: Both of them, because both men had enough faith to get on the plane. Likewise, Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* (Matthew 17:20 NIV)

The Spirit's testimony strengthens our faith with Bible passages like Philippians 2:13: *“It is God who makes you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”* Feel the comfort? If you even have the desire to believe, it proves that God is already working in your heart. He is giving you the gift of saving faith. Since God the Holy Spirit gives and strengthens faith through His Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and sacrament, let Him complete His work in you, so that you can also *“do of His good pleasure.”* Now that God has given you faith to board the plane, relax. Jesus is also the Pilot. He will get you there.

As children of God we are *“heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings that we may also share in his glory.”* Bearing our Christian crosses and suffering with Christ on earth is much easier if we remember our inheritance of eternal life from God who adopted us. If we do not suffer with Christ for the sake of the Gospel, we are illegitimate children forsaking the inheritance God wants to give. Our dear Lord Jesus feels the pain and suffering of His brothers and sisters today. He also wants us to suffer with Him – to weep with those who weep, to mourn with those who mourn. Otherwise, Judgment Day can come with some hard questions from God: *“Where is the cross I gave you to carry? Where are your crown of thorns, nail-pierced hands and feet that took you to places where people were hurting and in need of the Gospel? Did you not desire to suffer with me?”*

Eager Life in the Spirit! means **Suffering shared to glory.** Like an accountant, Paul adds up everything and totals the bottom line: *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.”* Instead of complaining about our troubles, we ought to focus on *the glory that will be revealed in us* when on the Last Day, all of creation finally gets its wish to see the *sons of God revealed.* May God who gave us faith also make us faithful Christians, empowered by God to live the **Eager Life in the Spirit!** Then we can joyfully pray, *“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”* (Revelation 22:20) Amen.

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