

**Romans 8:12-18**  
**Fellow Heirs—of Suffering**  
**Sunday May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

2016 is the latest year for which I found statistics on the number of Christians who died in a year for their faith. One group listed the number at over 7000, but they included only people for which they had a name and location of their death. In their estimation the number of Christians killed for their faith had tripled in 3 years. Another group put the number of Christians killed for their faith in 2016 as 90,000. Either way a lot of people are dying for what we believe.

In Indonesia a week ago a family of suicide bombers related to the ISIS in Iraq attacked 3 churches. They killed 12 and wounded at least 41. I, unfortunately, watched the video of one explosion. The car that exploded was going through a check point to get into the church compound as fortified as a border check point.

December 17<sup>th</sup> 2017 a UMC church in Pakistan was bombed.

Verse 8:17 says, “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ— if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

This seems to be saying that we have to suffer; it's a condition of our glorification in Christ. No, according to the Greek grammar it's saying that if you are Christian you... will... suffer. There is a cost to being a Christian, a follower of Christ. We not only inherit glory; we inherit suffering on the road to glory.

Now in this world there are different types of suffering. There is suffering brought on by the frailty of our bodies and the nature of this world. It is the suffering that is brought on by accidents, sickness, natural disasters and finally death.

There is suffering brought on by human sin and evil: greed, theft, lust, coveting, murder, war, the list is endless.

But today, I am addressing the suffering that comes with practicing our faith, with being righteous.

Jesus informed us we would suffer thus on many occasions in the Gospels. **‘Servants are not greater than their master. “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you;’** John 15:20

And, **“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”** Luke 9:23

And, **“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.**

**Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** Matthew 5:11

There is a cost to following Jesus, but as Jesus said, **“Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in Heaven.”** There will be glory!

Last week I heard a radio ad by a pastor from a Church here in Tucson who speaks of Christianity in the last couple of decades being sold as a self-help group. In other words, come to Jesus and everything will be sweetness and light, and everything will be alright.

I believed that when I was a young Christian and experienced a lot of the sweetness and light of Christianity in a youth group and later when I was saved for I came out of a lifestyle of a Prodigal son. I knew verse 13 first hand, **“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.”**

But then I started working in the church following my calling and soon found out that everything wasn't sweetness and light in the church and a close fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ. I should have realized having fought with all my family's brothers and sister at one time or another all wasn't going to be sweetness and light.

My 2<sup>nd</sup> week as a youth director I had a planning meeting that went like this, I asked, “What do you want to do? To which the youth replied,

“I don’t know, what do you want to do?” I gave some suggestions only to be met by blank stares, grimaces and no’s, and finally I asked what was going on. One of the boys, who was a leader of the group, told me, “We don’t have any respect for you!” and that was pretty much the end of the meeting.

The first pastor I worked with was chronically depressed and the next the extremely cynical. I decided after working with him that if I had to work with another depressed or cynical pastor I was going to seek another career. Then Rev. Jack Troutman became my senior pastor who was a bright ray of sunshine wherever he went. He was driven out of Mississippi after a confrontation with the KKK when he decided to integrate his church. He suffered for righteousness.

We read today the call of Isaiah, which we often sing about with the brave Hymn “Here I am Lord.” Isaiah’s call began with his lips being burned as a symbol of the forgiveness of his sin, but then he was called to a ministry of suffering. He was called to preach to a people whom he loved that the more he spoke to him the more they turned their back on him and his message.

God warned him, **“Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.’** Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.”

When we say yes to serving God we open the door to suffering for righteousness. In America it’s not physical suffering as it is mental anguish. If you want to do great things for God be ready to pay a price.

I read a book about a young man who said this about Jesus, “Jesus ruined my life!” I had everything a teenage boy could want. I was the captain of the football team, popular with all the girls. I had college scholarships for a career that would have made me rich. Then I met Jesus and God called me to being a traveling evangelist who now lives an almost monastic lifestyle.’ Yes, Jesus ruined his old life and gave him a new life. Jesus introduced him to suffering... and glory.

This is Memorial Day weekend where we honor those who sacrificed for our freedom. Every Memorial Day weekend, I always remember this scripture from 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

There is freedom from the past, freedom from sin, freedom from unforgiving hearts and so much more.

We are worshipping here in peace and security, because others have paid a very high price, the ultimate price for our freedom, and our security. We are worshipping here in security and peace, because others paid a high price in terms of time, money, prayers and even their lives.

This is also Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate the Holy Trinity. We celebrate and honor the Trinity because the Trinity is a reality, that I believe, goes beyond human words to explain. I also found in my research for this sermon that almost every analogy I have ever used in a children’s moment to explain the Trinity treads into some sort of heresy.

Like the analogy for the Trinity of water in three different states this is the heresy of modalism. Or the analogy of a star with the star, light and heat as the 3 parts of the Trinity this is the heresy of Arianism. Or my favorite analogy is the Trinity as a three leaf clover, which is the heresy of Partialism. We can no more understand God than my dog can understand me. The Nicæan creed makes a good stab at it though.

Analogies are not very good ways of explaining the Trinity, and if you want to see a very humorous way of explaining this, see a YouTube video called “St. Patrick’s Bad Analogies”. I would have played part of it here, but the characters speak so fast it is difficult to understand.

I do understand the Holy Trinity best as a relationship of 3 persons, which is why I love this Greek Orthodox Icon of the Trinity so much.



Note the 3 androgynous figures, because of course God is neither male nor female, and note how they tilt their heads to one another. The Trinity's relationship is reflected in the relationships and fellowship of the church. The three sit around a communion cup. In Christ's suffering God suffered for us. In our Romans reading today all three members of the Trinity are involved as well as their relationship to each other and to us.

Indeed it is all about relationship. We are saved by a personal relationship with Jesus that brings us into a personal relationship with the whole Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I speak often of the DNA of the Bible being that of **Covenant and Kingdom or Relationship and Responsibility**.

**It is in exercising the Responsibility, the righteousness of the Kingdom that we suffer unto glory.**

Our relationship with God in our Romans Scripture is illustrated in terms of Adoption, Roman adoption which leads to the creation of a new family.

The steps to adoption in ancient Rome are rather fascinating, but the important thing for us to know is that when adopted in ancient Rome you went from the power and control of one father to another.

In ancient Roman law and culture a father had "the power of absolute disposal and control over his family and in the early days it was actually the power of life and death. In relation to his father, a Roman son never came of age. No matter how old he was, he was still in the absolute possession and under the absolute control of his father." Barclay

Romans p. 124

"So for a son (or daughter too) to be adopted by another man meant a complete break from their past. An adopted person lost all the

rights of their old family and gained all the rights of their new family. The old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out including all debts. He was regarded as a new person entering a new life.”

Part of the process of adoption was that it was witnessed by 7 people in case in the future anyone would say that the adoption, and more importantly the inheritance were illegitimate. In our Roman passage the Holy Spirit stood as the witness. Verses 16b and 17 say, “When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” It goes on to say, “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”

Adults were adopted by other adults for reasons of inheritance and the transfer of royal power. One of the best examples is that the Emperor Claudius adopted Nero in order that Nero might succeed him to the throne. This happened much to the dismay of Christians who later suffered under Nero’s persecution being blamed by Nero for the burning of Rome. Nero at one point had 1000 Christians crucified and set on fire to light up one of his night parties. The recent movie “Paul, Apostle of Christ” graphically illustrated this.

‘So the image Paul was calling to mind for the early Christians was that of being adopted out of the family of satan (the father of lies) with its slavery to sin and death into the “Family of God.” The idea was of a clean break with the past and all its debt of sin and shame into a new family where you could call God “Abba, Father” and receive a new life and a new inheritance of eternal life.’

‘We then begin a new life with God as Father and become joint heirs with Jesus Christ, God’s own Son. Whatever Christ inherits we also inherit. If Christ had to suffer, we also inherit that suffering; but, if Christ was raised to life and glory, we also inherit that life and that glory.’

Barclay Romans p. 126

So there you have it on this Trinity Sunday the whole Trinity involved in moving us from a relationship with sin that leads to eternal death to an adoptive relationship with God the Father.

This then makes Jesus our brother and the whole process is empowered and witnessed by the Holy Spirit. Out of this new relationship comes new life and glory!

We can then say with Paul, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.”

Yes we will suffer for righteousness for our faith. There is a cost, but that suffering is the path to glory!

What is God saying to you and what are you going to do!

In Jesus' name amen.