

“By the Spirit’s Power”  
Romans 8:1-8  
July 12, 2020

The other day I saw funny picture of my daughter Isabelle riding a skateboard. She and her husband are living in Southern California and since she has always wanted to learn to ride a skateboard, they went out together—Adam on his bike and Isabelle on the board. It’s my understanding that he was there to help her get going and to give her some tips on how to actually stay up and ride. But apparently that didn’t last too long. Because the picture was not of Isabelle powering down the street on her own. No, the picture was of her sitting on the board being towed behind her husband’s bicycle. It was really cute. Of course I couldn’t help but think of all those days we spent with all of our kids, teaching them how to ride a bicycle. Either me or my wife would run alongside, holding on to the seat, trying to keep them from crashing. The goal, of course, was that sooner or later, they wouldn’t need one of us to hold on because they could do it on their own. I’m confident that will be the case with Isabelle and her skateboarding. Hopefully one day, she’ll learn to go it alone, under her own power.

But whether it’s a picture of a husband trying to help his wife ride a skateboard, or a parent trying to teach a child how to ride a bike, these images usually end with the person eventually doing the thing on their own, without help, under their own power. And while this what we expect with things like this, when it comes to our lives as Christians, this is never the goal. Because from beginning to end, from the new birth we are given in Baptism, to the promise of resurrection on the last day, we are Christians, not because of our own power, but only because of the Holy Spirit’s power.

So as we begin a new sermon series today based on Romans Chapter 8 – a series we are calling “Anchor,” because this chapter gives such witness to the fundamental teachings that ground us in the faith, our focus is the great and mysterious truth of the Holy Spirit’s power in our lives from beginning to end.

But first, I think it’s helpful to remember what Paul was trying to do with this letter to the Romans. He had never visited the church. He didn’t know them personally. But that didn’t matter, because what Paul did know was

how God was at work in the world. Of course, we know that living in first century Rome as a Christian had its problems. But Paul was telling them that there was something greater than the problems—something so big that it changes a person's life and how they live it. And it was something bigger than any of them could ever see on their own.

Fast forward many centuries later, and here we are. The Roman Empire is no more. The way we do things in the world is different. The way we relate to each other is different. And yet the God of all creation is still at work through his Spirit. Still at work leading people to believe in what God has done in Christ to fulfill the law's demands. Still at work assuring us that we are free. Still at work empowering us to make choices in our daily living that are pleasing.

Now, I am going to get to our text today, I promise. But for us to really grasp the enormity of these words, we have to be reminded of what Paul writes in chapter 7. We heard some of these words last week. But if you missed them, let me remind you of the highlights. Life is a struggle with sin. "For I have the desire to do what is right, Paul says, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." Even if you missed this, I guarantee you get it, because this is how it is for every single one of us. The struggle we face every day is real. We want to do right, but we fail and end up doing what we didn't want to do. But the Christian life is more than just admitting that we can't do it, no matter how hard we try. It's knowing that we never go it alone. And not going alone has enormous consequences. And today, Paul is telling us why.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." And who are the ones in Christ Jesus? The baptized. Why is there no condemnation for them? Verse 3 & 4 : "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, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." In other words, these first 4 verses in Chapter 8 are the resolution of the whole problem exposed in chapter 7. By the Spirit's power—his act completely—he brings this good news of God's work in Christ into our lives. He creates the faith that with absolute certainty can declare that by God's grace we are saved through Christ and Christ alone!

But there's more because Paul goes on to refer to believers as those "who now walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." And here is where we sinners might want to object, because we know that the problem of doing what we don't want to do is still there. Walking in the flesh is our go to. But we aren't left to go it alone nor are we left to just hope for the best. By the same spirit, who by his power, set us free through the gift of faith, he directs our minds to walk in him.

And what does that look like? Verse 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. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Paul goes on to say it's bad news for those who in the flesh because they can't please God. You, however are in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. You belong to Christ. And if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life.

I mean, this all sounds so good, right? Life and peace? But how do we get that when still fail to love as we should—when we still desire the easy road over any road that takes significant effort? But just as we don't get to decide if we are in Christ Jesus or not, we're not left alone to figure out what this Christian life should look like on a daily basis. We are freed in Christ from condemnation. **Now**, by the Spirit's power, he uses the good news to lead us into choices that are right and pleasing. Think about that....**It doesn't** mean we're immune from the struggle. We will continue to be tempted. We will all experience doubt. We will still try and make up our own rules about life and go it alone. If we go too far we're in trouble. But the promise is we aren't alone. The Spirit is life. He dwells in us. And he will direct us over and over again, even when we fail, towards the things that he desires. And we know what those things are—a living and active faith in Christ. A joyful outlook towards loving and serving others. An intentional fight against sin.

According to God himself, this is who you are, my friends. The Spirit is in you. By his power, he brought you to faith, and is working through word and sacrament to strengthen that faith, while at the same time enabling you to use your gifts and talents to expand his kingdom. Thank God for that! Because Our faith isn't an exercise like teaching a kid to ride a bike or a young newlywed to ride a skateboard. It's God the Spirit freeing us first

from condemnation, and then empowering us to live this life in his name. If he can do that for underserving people like you and me, there's no telling what he will do through us.

And it all leads to the promise of verse 8. "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." It's resurrection. It's power. Power that brings us into the kingdom of God. Power that enables us to live as his servants. Power that will one day raise us from the dead. One our own, we're done. But we're not on our own. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**