

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1)¹

I think we all have different things that we sometimes have anxiety about. Is that a fair statement? What do you have anxiety about? Do you have anxiety about your health or the health of someone else? Do you have anxiety about finances? Or maybe your job.

At its worst anxiety can be very debilitating. Anxiety and fear can really plague a person. That’s why it’s so comforting in this week’s Bible passage when Paul says that God did not give us his Spirit **“so that you live in fear again” (8:15).**

Notice that it says, **“again.”** What could Paul mean by this word **“again”**? Commentators point out that Paul is likely thinking of life under the law. If you think about your relationship with God in terms of God’s law, then that is going to make you afraid. There will be times when you will suspect, maybe I haven’t kept God’s law well enough. And that suspicion will be right. Think about Isaiah in our first lesson today. He found himself in the presence of a holy God and he said, **“Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5).** Are you a person of unclean lips? Have your lips ever spoken gossip, or hateful words, or cursing? If you think about your relationship with God on the basis of his Law then his Law is always going to condemn you.

And so God had to open up another way for us to have a relationship with him. And he opened up that way by sending his Son and his Spirit. He sent his Son to take on himself the curse of the Law in our place. So Paul says at the beginning of Romans 8 that **“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1).** Through faith in Jesus we don’t have to be afraid of God’s judgment. There’s no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And God sent his Spirit to unite us to Jesus. And since we are united to Jesus, God’s Son, that means that we are also God’s sons and daughters. Through faith in Christ, our relationship with God is not a relationship based on the law. Instead, God’s relationship with us is that of a Father to children. By uniting us to Jesus, God’s Son, the Spirit brought about our adoption to sonship (8:15).

And that takes away all fear. The first way that having God as our Father takes away fear is that when we do feel anxiety, we can go to our Father in prayer. Paul says, **“And by [the Spirit] we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (8:15).** **“Abba”** is an Aramaic word that means **“Father.”** Commentators point out that this is how Jesus himself addressed God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, **“Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).** Jesus addressed God as **“Abba, Father”** and now by the Spirit we also address God as **“Father.”**

Isn’t wonderful that we have a Father in heaven that we can go to with all of our anxiety and fear. The famous hymn **“What a friend we have in Jesus”** really is true, **“Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.”** I said in my Thanksgiving sermon, Think of how much less anxiety we would feel if instead of worrying about something, we prayed about it.

We have a Father in heaven who delights to hear the prayers of his dear children. Martin Luther picked up on this in the Small Catechism. In the Lord’s Prayer we address God as **“Our Father in heaven.”** And Martin Luther

¹ All Bible quotations in this sermon are taken from the NIV.

said, "With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father."

One commentator said think of the free access that children have to their fathers. Think of the confidence with which they come to their fathers with a request. My kids like to draw. The problem is that they are constantly running out of paper. And they come up to me and say, "Daddy, can I have more paper." Now I also use a lot of paper. So recently my wife bought for me a 500 page pack of computer paper. And I said I was going to keep it all to myself. That of course didn't last very long. Now when Luke or James comes up to me and says, "I need some more paper." And go and give a few sheets of paper from my pack.

Now if I fulfill my children's request for paper, how much more is our Father going to fulfill our requests for help and take away our anxiety and fear. The Spirit he gave us doesn't make us live in fear again. The Spirit he gave us gives us faith to cry out Abba, Father! So the next time you feel anxiety, instead of losing sleep over it, cry out "Abba! Father!"

The second way that having God as our Father takes away fear is that it means that whatever we go through in this life, we have an inheritance in heaven. Paul says, "**Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and coheirs with Christ**" (Romans 8:17). We have fears and anxieties in this life, but in the next verse in Romans Paul is going to go on to say that he considers that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed in us. Sometimes our anxieties might make us feel like we are trapped. But later in Romans 8 Paul is going to mention the freedom and glory of the children of God that we are going to have when Christ returns. When Christ returns we will be set free from every fear and every anxiety. We will no more anxieties about our health, because our bodies will be glorified with Christ. We will be forever set free from everything that burdens us, everything that weighs us down.

It's true that we suffer in this life, Paul says that after we have suffered, we will share in Christ's glory. He says: "**if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory**" (8:17). And while we suffer in this life the Spirit comforts us by reminding us that we are children our God. Paul says, "**The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children**" (Romans 8:16). Here Paul says that the Holy Spirit reminds us that we are God's children. And also our own spirit reminds us that we are God's children. "**The Spirit himself testifies with our Spirit that we are God's children**" (8:19). So the next time you feel anxiety and fear, be reminded by the Spirit and remind yourself, that you are a child of God. You are a child of God who can bring your burdens and your cares before your heavenly Father. You are a child of God and that means you are an heir of God and coheir with Christ.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are. And that is what we are.

Amen.