

Texts: Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-39; Matt. 28:16-20

Subject: Life in the Spirit

Theme: Sighs Too Deep For Words

Sunday of Pentecost; June 9, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven through our risen and living Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you felt worn out? In despair? Just exhausted? What makes you feel this way? What do you do when you get that feeling?

[time for discussion]

There are so many things that can drive us to despair, to make us feel like life is all tragedy, suffering, pain and misery. The psalmist knew it too - Psalm 44:22 says "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

We call this a lament. I think there's righteous anger there too. People even in ancient times felt the same feelings we feel from time to time. They felt hopelessness. They were afraid. They needed help. This word of God matters - it's lasted for thousands of years for a reason. The Apostle Paul quotes the Psalm. Sometimes, in our lives, we just don't have the words, and our feelings come out as just breath.

We sigh. We exhale. Our pain come out as pure exasperation - sighs too deep for words.

We despair at the events of the news, at each economic downturn, slowing job growth and international tensions, immigrant families detained, deported, torn apart, and abused mass shootings, hate crimes, police violence, loss of friends and loved ones - so many we wish were still here.

When we don't have the words to pray, when we've cried all the tears we have, and things don't seem to be changing for the better. We have to let it out in a deep breath. We know *sighs too deep for words* - when the words run out and our breath escapes, bodies exhausted with pain, fear, anger, and grief - what can we say? What can we do?

First, we remember who we are. *We are children of God.*

Paul writes to the church at Rome and reminds them of who they are in Christ Jesus. All who are baptized are children of God. We belong to God, so we belong together. In Jesus, God was stooping down to us, gathering us in and making us new. Through baptism, we are siblings with Christ, and just like he suffered, so do we. But just like he was raised from death, and belongs with God, so do we.

This week as I celebrated my birthday, the kids made me cards. Each one was unique and creative and special - better than any card from Target or the dollar store. They gave me gifts - one of Isaac's legos, a video game, tickets to a concert - that's pretty cool. But I'm their father - the one who gives them everything they need. I delight in what they have to offer, but I just love to be with them, to have fun, and see their smiles, to answer their questions, to guide them and help them grow. I want them to know they are loved unconditionally - no matter what they do - they are mine and I am theirs.

As God's children, we long to know that divine love in our lives. We might wonder if we're doing what God wants us to do, going where God wants us to go. We don't have face to face contact.

Jesus promises to send the advocate, the *paraclete*, the helper that will be with the disciples after Jesus ascends to heaven. He promises them power to do even greater works than his own. And they do! So we should expect the same!

This church is the body of Christ assembled here every week, as we gather for worship. This Spirit creates and re-creates community, draws us into fellowship with God and one another, makes us like family, heirs, recipients of all that Jesus has received - suffering and glory too.

The whole creation is suffering - we know this well - the world is warming, oceans rising, storms seem to be more intense, and more frequent. Rainforests and barriers reefs, and glaciers have suffered beyond repair. How can they be made new? More *sighs too deep for words*.

This glory that God has promised us, has gifted to us through Christ is so great, that we wait with patience and hope. The devastation and suffering of the world hurts, but we know that God is good, and we will not live in fear. With this hope, we can move forward - advocate, serve, study, and devise solutions to problems we face together. Since we have hope, we don't give up on the creation, but can listen to one another, to find small ways to create larger and lasting change for future generations.

This church has always served the community in a Spirit of hope. The Catherine center here at Reformation Lutheran Church was a resource for neighbors in need for many years, before folding into Lutheran Social Services of Nevada. LSSN has brought new technology to help feed people in our community through its Digimart - where people use a website to pick out the foods they can use, and volunteers have it ready to go for them. With the help of a grant of nearly *half a million dollars* from the Nevada

Women's Philanthropy, LSSN is now ready to expand their food pantry - at their new building on Boulder Highway and Desert Inn - to feed even more people in our city.

When problems are big, when suffering persists, we do not give up.

Above all, the Spirit binds us together, and us to Jesus - God's living Word. This Spirit allows us to hear God's Word like those first hearers at Pentecost, to understand, to find new insight, new ways to understand what God has done for us in Jesus. The Spirit creates faith when we hear the Word.

The Spirit is at work, in us and for us. And that same Spirit is there to intercede - to work on our behalf, and to be the power that brings our prayers before God. That is truly powerful. The Spirit is MORE than just a helper - The Holy Spirit DOES it for us - prays for us, comforts us, renews us, allows us to hear God's Word of Grace and builds faith in us. The Spirit is always there, never letting us down, even when we fall into the depth of our own misery and the weight of the world is on our shoulders, we STILL believe, because we ARE children of God. We HAVE the Spirit that Christ gave us, in us and with us at all times.

New Testament Professor Beverly Roberts Gaventa says that Paul's letter is 'trash talk' to any powers that would seek to bring down the believers. She writes, "Paul looks at all the harmful circumstances in which human beings live, he sees behind those the work of God's own enemies, and he confidently declares God will have the last word. He shakes his fist in the face of all these powers, and says "No power has the power like Christ's power." Rendered in the vernacular, what Paul means is, "you're going down."¹

¹ Gaventa, Beverly Roberts, *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger with the Gospel according to Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 40.

So we don't just talk to hear our own breath, we don't get lost in our despair, or retreat when we get knocked down. We get up. We speak up. We march. We write. We teach. We listen and learn and grow. We get up and go out. We are sent by the same Spirit - to go, and share it.

The same Spirit that hovered over the waters at creation, that was breathed into the first human made from the earth, the Spirit that descended on Jesus in the form of a dove, and rolled into Jerusalem with the sound of a freight train and flames of fire that first Pentecost, lives and breathes in us, and sends us out for the life of the world - for the cosmos.

Even in our *sighs too deep for words*, we are reminded that we are not alone. God is working for us, in us, through us. God is working to heal us, to renew us, to free us. God is healing the creation, and preparing us for the fullness of the the glory of God.

We need the Spirit of God to hold us together - it unites us with God. She is the bond of love between Father and Son, and between the creation and the Creator. And Paul proclaims the promise of the Spirit: now that we have it - NOTHING can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. NOTHING.