

A Sermon from Pastor Konrad Rönnecke
Sermon for the 14th Sunday after Trinity
Sermon Text: Romans 8:14-17

Dear Congregation, what drives us? We can't move forward without motivation. We need energy for that. And energy is what everyone is talking about today: whether gas, nuclear power, oil, solar energy, coal, wind. When it comes to cars, the focus is on electric energy. Nobody knows for sure whether this is the key to success or not. What motivated you to get up this morning? Were you happy or distressed because the night was too short? What moved you to go to church? Was it a given that you would come today, or did you have to drag yourself here? Was it an inner need or anticipation to meet with other people and friends? What drives us to get up in the morning, to go to school or work or university, to face daily tasks? Maybe it's our habits that drive us. There are definitely good habits like honesty, not throwing away food, working diligently, punctuality. Maybe it's our parents who work hard or our upbringing or our environment that influences us. But it can also be fear that drives us. Fear of missing something, of being left behind, of being wronged. Curiosity and longing for success and recognition are strengths that inspire us and allow us to move forward. And we mustn't forget the events and spirit of our time, the news and opinions and the images that influence our thoughts, our actions, our behaviors, our lifestyle, and our beliefs. This spirit is strong – people want to belong, keep up with the times, not make fools of themselves and be excluded. What drives us? Who or what gives our lives motivation?

The apostle Paul explored this question. In his letter to the Christians in Rome, we are given an alternative drive. In the epistle from this Sunday, Romans 8:14-17, the apostle writes: *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.*

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God..." what motivation! The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is a person. We profess our faith in Him when we pray: "I believe in the Holy Spirit." We are baptized into Him. We worship in His name: *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. He is the one whom Jesus promised His disciples, who has been working with all His power since Pentecost, who fills people and sets them in motion. He is also at work today. How does this alternative motivation work? Why and where does God the Holy Spirit drive us? The apostle Paul names six ways that the Holy Spirit impacts us:

1. We receive free access to the Father

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Holy Spirit doesn't drive us to roll up our sleeves, spit into our hands, and to get going. The first thing God's Spirit moves us to do is sigh, a short simply cry, a confession: "Abba, Father." Abba isn't the Swedish music group "ABBA" whose music moves crowds to sing along. Instead, "abba" is the Aramaic word for "papa" or "daddy." For Christ's sake, God is our dear Father – not a strict "Lord Father" or a liturgical "Almighty God, merciful Father." No, "abba" is the loving, trusting address of a child to its loving father: papa or daddy. The Holy Spirit places this in our mouths. Does that come naturally to us? To call on God personally, full of trust like children address their dear father as Papa? Or is God a distant, higher power for us? Someone we are afraid of; someone we have to cower away from? God's Spirit moves us to recognize that God is my loving Father. He wants what is best for me. And I am His beloved child. "Abba, Father" – that is the address of an adult daughter or son, full of trust and expectation – so says the Apostle Paul.

2. We receive the assurance that we belong to God

God's Spirit creates a firm, even shameless certainty. Paul says it this way: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*. The Holy Spirit plants a deep and firm certainty in our hearts: I am and remain a child of the Father in heaven. Nothing and no one can rip me from His hand (Romans 8:31ff). In the past, this was called "assurance of salvation." "Assurance of salvation" is not to be mixed up with a nice feeling, exuberant joy, or dependent upon our good mood. God's Spirit places a firm certainty in our soul: you are God's beloved child. Sometimes a person must be assured of this because Satan sows doubt within them since Satan shows us our imperfections and lack of faith, or we feel abandoned. But here in worship, here you are told and promised: "Your sins are forgiven in God's name." Here you can hear it again: *"I am a baptized Christian who,*

despite human weaknesses – sickness, guilt, fear, and worry – is still a child of God.” And you go home, go into the new week, under the protection and blessing of the Father.

The 3rd impact is freedom: the freedom of God’s children

The passages says: “If you are led by the Spirit of God, then you are no longer slaves. You no longer have to bend over backwards and work non-stop to please everyone.” (verse 14 according to the pastor’s own translation) What a ray of hope for everyone who must suffer under the great expectations of other people or have a hard time saying *No*. Of course, we should ask ourselves: Where am I needed? How can I use my gifts and talents? Where do I need to take on responsibility? But I’m not a slave to my boss or my company or my customers or my staff. I can say when it gets to be too much, when it gets out of hand, when I can’t do it anymore. God doesn’t see me as His slave. I am His child. He sets my feet in a broad place (Psalm 31:8b).

4. Another impact in our life: If the Holy Spirit moves us, then that leads to a change in our life

Then priorities are shifted. Then I wish that God’s kingdom comes, His will be done, that His name is kept holy. I don’t want all of this out of fear or reluctance, but rather, I long for what is good, desirable, life-enhancing, and joyful with all my heart. And I begin to clean up one area of my life at a time, with God’s Spirit as my close counsellor and source of strength. Even when that doesn’t always work, and I let myself get carried away again or fall into a trap – then I don’t give up. With God’s strength, I can begin anew and continue on the path of faith, love, and prudence.

5. The Holy Spirit makes us capable of compassion and suffering

In chapter 8 of Romans, the passage from which our sermon text is taken, Paul writes a lot about suffering. With this, the apostle dampens the expectations of all those who think: come to Jesus and everything will be good. Paul grounds us. We live in a world full of problems and pain. The consequences of our disobedience to God are ever-present. And they won’t get better if we consider God’s will to be outdated and no longer appropriate for modern life and adapt to the mainstream. Paul makes it clear: When God’s Spirit drives us, then we will suffer with Christ. That doesn’t sound appealing. But “suffering” doesn’t just mean that we are laughed at because of our faith or that we experience resistance or are even oppressed and persecuted. The suffering of Jesus, which preceded all external suffering, was the suffering of human misery. We are told in the Gospels about Jesus: *When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them.*” (Matt. 9:36a) It is Jesus’ deep compassion for us humans. It is His mercy when He looks at the fate of people: Be it because they are far from the Father, because they feel unloved, because injustice or violence is done to them, because sin and guilt are destroying them. It always breaks His heart. Suffering with Christ means, as Paul makes clear here: we are no longer indifferent to what breaks Jesus’ heart. God’s Spirit doesn’t make us hard-hearted and unfeeling or indifferent, it makes us compassionate and active, helpful, connected, search for solutions. There is a deeper sense now to the fact that the “Lord’s Prayer” doesn’t start with the words: “*My Father in heaven*” but with “*Our Father.*” Being a child of God applies to me personally, but it isn’t *just* for me. It integrates me into the family of God, in which my brother and sister are also children of God. God’s Spirit moves us to reach out to others, to visit the sick, to care for those who no longer have a connection. He moves us to worship together, to do things together, to share, to help, to exchange ideas, and so to strengthen one another.

6. Finally, the Holy Spirit gives us hope, a serene perspective beyond this life

Whoever is a child is also an heir. Here in our life, everything remains provisional, fragmented, and the things we enjoy can quickly fall apart. But in God’s new world, everything will be perfect, unbeatably good and beautiful – in other words: the best is yet to come. Dear congregation! God’s Spirit is ***the*** alternative energy. Led by the Holy Spirit, we have ***free access to the Father*** in heaven, we are given the ***certainty*** of being God’s children, we discover the ***freedom of being God’s children***, we experience ***gradual changes in life***, we gain the ***ability to empathize and suffer***, and we have the ***perspective*** of a person who has the best yet ahead of them.

We are faced with the question: Do I want this? The question isn’t if we want to be motivated by something. We always are! The question is: what motivation do we allow to move us? Do you want to lead your life under the loving and strong hand of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? He doesn’t pressure us. But He invites us to do so. Let us pray: *O Holy Spirit, come into us and let us be Your dwelling place, O come, sun of our hearts. O light of heaven, let Your light be strong with us and in us for constant joy and delight. You want to give us sun, delight, and heavenly life when we pray; we come to You* (SELK Hymn 480). And together we say: Amen, so let it be.