

¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.^[f] And by him we cry, “*Abba,*^[g] Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

In Christ Jesus,

The planet Mars has been in the news lately. Since the 1960’s several nations have sent spacecraft zooming past our nearest planetary neighbor. But that’s nothing compared to the events of recent years. China has joined the United States in landing robotic vehicles on the planet’s surface. Scientists predict that we will be able to send a person to Mars before our kindergarteners graduate from High School.

The dream of science is to find any trace of life on Mars. But the question that I’d like you to ask today is much closer to home. *“Is there evidence of life in you?”*

I. Spiritually Dead

Obviously, you are alive. The life I’m talking about is “*spiritual*” life. Paul says in our lesson, *“if you live according to the flesh, you will die.”*

These words are shocking because “*flesh*” is God’s way of describing our “*elemental self*”. In other words, if you do what comes naturally and follow the desires, decisions, and impulses of your natural self, you will die!

As a way of learning about our flesh, I’d like you to consider the example of our children. In five days, the school bell will ring for the final time here at St. John’s. On Friday afternoon children will pour out of their classrooms and enjoy three months of freedom. Mr. Payne and the other teachers will be here on Monday morning to welcome all the children who decide to *exercise* that freedom by waking up early and returning to school. (*Note: The faculty has meetings planned in the off chance that no one shows up*).

It should humble us to consider that peace and good order in our society are largely dependent on fear of punishment and restraint. Consider what would happen if the police, and our criminal justice system ceased to exist. Our sinful nature is like an excited puppy tugging with all its might at the leash. The leash constrains us and reigns us in. If the leash is dropped, the puppy runs. Our sinful flesh wants to run... and not to places that are good!

The Apostle Paul says, *“Our feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark our ways,”* Again he says, *“The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God...it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”* *“the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”* These thoughts and impulses do not come from outside sources, but from within our very self.

In the very beginning, Satan had a difficult task. He had to try to get a healthy Adam and Eve to reach out and poison themselves. Once he succeeded, Satan's work was easy. We ourselves *are* the poison!

Never mind finding life on Mars. My sinful flesh leaves me hopelessly looking for life in myself!

II. Life in the Triune God

But Paul continues in our lesson and brings us the glorious truth of the Trinity.

Today is Trinity Sunday. It's a day when we recite Creeds and examine complicated theological statements about God. Sometimes, I fear that we think of God as something far away and impossibly distant. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is infinite and fills the heavens. Yet the Trinity teaches me how he comes impossibly close to me.

Paul writes, "*those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.*" Did you notice what the Spirit does? The Spirit "*leads*" me. This isn't the leash of God's Law that drags me kicking and screaming through life. The Spirit turns me away from my poisonous self and lovingly *leads* me to Jesus.

Paul describes it this way, "*The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba,"^[a] Father.*" *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*"

To understand this work of the Spirit, we can once again turn to the example of our children. Remember how a child learns to say it's first words. Hebrew children were no different from children today. The first words they learned to speak were "*Mama*" and "*Dadda*", or in Hebrew; "*Eem*" and "*Abba*". How did you learn to speak those words?

When you were an infant, you didn't gaze up at your parents and ask yourself "*Who are these strange people, and what shall I call them?*" That's not how it worked! Your mother and father spent hours, days, and weeks with you long before you understood your relationship. They spoke to you... they "*testified*" to you who they were. "*Mama*". "*Dadda*". They repeated their *testimony* until the magical day when you put two and two together and spoke your first words.

"*The Spirit himself testifies with your spirit that you are God's child.*" The Holy Spirit looks down upon you and repeats this truth over and over until it takes root in your heart through faith. The Son has redeemed you. The Father has adopted you. The truth of the Trinity is complex. But from the time that you were baptized as an infant the truth of the Trinity has been taught to you by God himself!

As a result, there's a news story that grabs our attention. In a desolate place with a poisonous atmosphere... life has been found! Life thrives in you! The source of this life is nothing other than God himself; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In a few moments, the church bells will ring. Children of God will go free into the world. Blessings to each of you as the Spirit leads you to exercise that freedom by living a life of grace and love in the name of the triune God.

-Amen