

The Quiet, Persistent Power of Your Life
A Sermon on Romans 8:14-17 by the Rev. Philip Major
St. Paul's ~ Syracuse, NY ~ June 8, 2025

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. As we move forward together, in troubling times, we remember Jesus' words to us. *Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

We who seek to be *led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For we did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but we have received a spirit of adoption.* We seek to be led by the Spirit. For we have not received a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but we have received a spirit of adoption.

How can we tell we are being led by the Spirit of God? And what does it mean for us to receive a spirit of adoption?

It's not easy to know for sure exactly when we are being led by the Spirit. Sometimes Christians claim they are being led by the Holy Spirit when they are clearly being led astray. Some of our best guidance about knowing the difference came a few years ago from Michael Curry, who served as our Presiding Bishop until last summer. Bishop Michael reminded us, "If it's not about love, it's not about God."

Let's put this in positive terms. If we are doing something for the sake of love, then it's possible we are being guided by the Holy Spirit. Since people often get confused the meaning of love, let's be more specific. If we are doing something in order to serve God's people or in order to care for God's creation, then it's possible we are being guided by the Holy Spirit.

This only happens when we deliberately put aside the spirit of slavery and receive a spirit of adoption. You and I, each one of us, have a tendency to fall into a spirit of slavery. We can tell we are falling into a spirit of slavery when strong negative feelings are taking hold of us: anger, fear, and shame. When we feel ourselves getting pulled deeper into the anger, the fear, and the shame of our lives, we chain ourselves to behaviors and ways of thinking that enslave us. We become enslaved to behaviors and ways of thinking that hurt us and the people we love.

St. Paul reminds us, *we did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but we have received a spirit of adoption.* St. Paul calls it a spirit of adoption because we have to let ourselves be adopted into God's family. This is one of those beautiful adoptions, where we get to choose. We get to choose whether we are going to keep falling deeper into our shame, our fear, and our anger, or let God change our lives through the spirit of adoption.

God has given you a great power, the power to love. Yet we can only exercise the power of love when we give up the spirit of slavery and receive the spirit of adoption that God is giving us. In other words, we have the ability to love another person, but only when we acknowledge that the love is coming from God.

You and I understand that the love that motivates our kindness and service does not come from us. God's love is not something we are entitled to. It's not our birthright. We have the power to love because God has adopted us as members of God's family.

And so we call out to God for direction and guidance in our lives. Paul uses the expression, "Abba! Father". I would say *When we cry out to God, "I'm stuck!, or I can't do this on my own!"* we are turning toward God the way a child turns to their mother or father for guidance or assurance. When we turn toward God *it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.* And if we are God's children, *then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we co-suffer with Christ so that God's love may work through us, as it worked through Christ Jesus.*

This is the greatest gift of our lives, to live as members of God's family, knowing that we are loved by God and seeking to share God's love with others. The power of love is a mystery. The creation and workings of love can be elusive. But the actions of love are not mysteries. Love means apologizing for mistakes we have made. Love means changing the way you do something because it works better for the other person. Love means being patient. Love means not taking offense at the actions of others. Love means being honest with others and ourselves, especially about our mistakes, our weaknesses, and our feelings.

This is the great power you have been given. The power of love is what the world desperately needs, especially today, in June of 2025. The power of love resembles the Holy Spirit in many ways. Like the Holy Spirit, the power of love works gently, quietly, slowly to bring goodness to the world. In most times and places the power of love is not loud and dramatic. Like the Holy Spirit, the power of love can be part of our lives at any moment of the day, and at every moment of the day if we will let it. It takes a lot of practice and effort. I'm still practicing.

The power of love that God has given you is like the tiny flame of a candle. It may not seem like much, but in the darkness the power of the tiny flame is life-giving. The same is true of the power of love that God has given you.

As is true of the tiny flame of the candle, we need to use our minds and our creativity to protect and increase the effectiveness of the love God has given us. If I take my candle outside for a walk on a windy night, or on a rainy morning, the flame will be extinguished. It's the same way for you and me when we are trying to bring our love to the world. We have to use our minds and our creativity.

Here is an example of people using their minds and the creativity to protect and increase the effectiveness of the love they are bringing to the world. It began in 1981. 1981 was not a great year in the city of Syracuse. Many businesses were closing. Unemployment was high. Prices were increasing. There were many hungry and homeless people in our city.

In 1981, members of St. Paul's and other churches came together to form a new organization. They called it 'The Samaritan Center'. For thirty-four years it was housed at St. Paul's, here at the center of the center of the State of New York. The Samaritan Center is God's people working together in order to make sure no one goes hungry. For forty-four years the work of the Samaritan Center has been like the flame of a candle, burning steadily and quietly, bringing goodness to people who need it most. And slowly, steadily the Samaritan Center grew larger and larger. Ten years ago, The Samaritan Center moved into their own building in the old St. John's Church on State Street.

Faithful people work together, pouring their energy, intelligence, and creativity into the Samaritan Center, in order to make their actions of love more effective. Yesterday morning and afternoon, a dozen members of St. Paul's worked together to put God's love into action and fed a nourishing meal to several hundred people at the Samaritan Center. The flame of God's love continues to burn steadily and quietly through the work of the Samaritan Center, not drawing much attention to itself, just bringing goodness to people who need it most.

You might be a person who serves meals at the Samaritan Center, or you might be a person who gives rides to people who need help getting to the doctor, or you might be a person who does not take offense at the actions of others, or you might be a person who apologizes when you've made a mistake. No matter which of these descriptions applies to you, you have been given the power to share God's love with the world.

Today, and this week, I want you to remember that the power of love is gentle and quiet and persistent. The power of love is like the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives: gentle, quiet, persistent and sometimes elusive or difficult to identify. Sometimes the power of love is so elusive, quiet and gentle, we forget that it is there, like a small candle.

So today I ask that you find one of the beeswax candles I have placed in the pews, and I ask that you hold the candle in your hands. This week I want you to remember that the actions of love you bring to the world may appear small and insignificant, like the tiny flame of the candle, but their effects are long lasting. When you take thirty minutes out of your day to fill *The Open Pantry* you have made someone else's day much better. When you accommodate another person by adjusting your behavior, your relationship will have more trust and strength. When you apologize to another person for a mistake you have made, your relationship will be healed.

Take the candle home and put it in a place where you will see it every day. When you see this little candle remember the power that has been given to you as an adopted member of God's family.

When you are feeling discouraged, when you begin to feel your spirit getting pulled down by feelings of fear, anger, or shame take a few minutes to sit down and light the little candle. Light the little candle and feel the breath filling your lungs. Be intentional about setting aside the spirit of fear and slavery, and make space for God's spirit of adoption in your life.

Light the little candle and pay attention to the flame. The flame is small and quiet, like the power of the love God has placed in the center of your life. This is the quiet, persistent power of your life. It's the power to forgive, the power to heal, the power to serve, the power to be changed, the power to love.