**Coronado Community Church**

“All in the Family”

Psalm 8 and Romans 8:14-17

A sermon by Pastor Eric Smith

June 5, 2022

Let’s begin with reflection. When we have a birthday we’ll often reflect on our lives. Today is Pentecost… affectionately known as the birthday of the church.

These are difficult days for churches and pastors. Church seems less and less relevant to people. (Not at the CCC – we’re fine – although we’re affected by these same dynamics) It’s a confluence of factors pressing on common ideas about faith.

One observation is that today’s culture knows less about the contents of the Bible than has been the case for most of American history. There are the effects of media on how reality is portrayed and experienced. There is a big disconnect with Judeo-Christian heritage. Kids today know a lot more about avatars than they do about Jesus’ disciples.

Another disconnect is that preachers are often unable to bridge the gap between the Biblical authors and us. It’s a big gap. Some preachers don’t even know it’s an issue. The result is that when folks come to a church service they have to suspend reality, and enter into a realm of angels and archangels, seraphim and cherubim, prophets and blood sacrifice… an ancient world where truth is relayed in hyperbole, written in forgotten foreign languages, and laden with values that modern sensibilities find barbaric. Yet, the Bible is our book – and it speaks to us out of its time, which is far removed from ours.

Today is Pentecost, which is esoteric in our culture, but is important to the Biblical story. Thus… I’m going to talk about it.

Pentecost was and is a feast day in Judaism. It is also known as the Feast of Weeks which was, and is, a celebration of the harvest of the first-fruits. In ancient agrarian culture, the barley crop would have just been gathered and the wheat would have just been planted. It was a pause – a special Sabbath to rest.

The origins of the Jewish feast of Pentecost go back to the Exodus from Egypt. It was the feast to celebrate the giving of the Law. Fifty days after coming through the Red Sea the Hebrews arrived at Mount Sinai, where Moses went up the mountain … and then came down … with tablets of stone on which was written God’s law.

Now… make a quantum leap forward fourteen hundred years to the time of the New Testament… fifty days after Easter Jesus went up to heaven and sent down the Holy Spirit to be the *new* law for God’s people. For the early Jewish followers of Jesus, this was the fulfillment of the Torah.

**The main character of Pentecost is the Holy Spirit.**

Many of you grew up reading and listening to the King James Bible. In King James language the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Holy Ghost.

I like Holy Spirit but I like *Holy Ghost*, too.

I heard the story of a man who is Christian and a businessman here in California. This man and his wife had Hindu friends from India who visited along with their 11 year old daughter. While his friends from India traveled around California on business, they left their daughter with the man and his family.

On Sunday the family went to church. The young girl was full of questions as the family got ready for church and she was excited to go along, too. On their way home, after church, the man asked his young guest what she thought of the service. She looked confused and said, *“I don’t understand why the West Coast isn’t included too.”*

The family had no idea what she meant. They were trying to figure out what she was talking about when the girl finally said, *“You know, they’re always saying ‘in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the* whole East Coast’*.”*

Alright – let’s look at passages.

I chose two passages for today because, hidden in these fragments of the ancient story is the bedrock of our faith in God.

The Psalmist wrote:

*3When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,*

*the moon and the stars that you have established;*

*4what are human beings that you are mindful of them,*

*mortals that you care for them?*

*5Yet you have made them a little lower than God,*

*and crowned them with glory and honor.*

A little lower than God. That is something to ponder. A little lower than God.

Psalm 8 asks us to think of ourselves… and everyone else, too, in this way… “A little lower than God….”

Our lives are agiftfrom God. An *exalted* gift from God… just a little lower than God.

The temptation, says one author, is to reduce *life* to size. A bowl of cherries. A rat race. A box of chocolates. Amino Acids. Even to call *life* “a mystery” smacks of reductionism. It is *the* mystery.

After lecturing learnedly on miracles, a great theologian was asked to give a specific example of one. *“There is one miracle,”* he answered. *“It is life.”*

**The second passage** is another fragment, this time from the Apostle Paul – and I paraphrase…

 …all who are led by the Spirit are children of God. …you did not receive a spirit of slavery… to fall back into fear…When we cry out to God it is that Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that *we are God’s children*… and if children, then heirs, *heirs of God* and joint heirs with Christ.

An inheritance is passed on to heirs – from parents, or grandparents, or another family member. We share an inheritance. Paul says that we are all in this family… God’s family. He said…

There is no reason to live with fear

You are God’s child

You are a miracle of God

Life – your life - is a miracle given us by God. We’re individual representations of the human experience – and we have more in common than what is different between us. Yet, at the same time, each of our lives is uniquely ours. No one else has the same experience that you do. No one else has the same perspective that you do.

We’re grateful for this… and for this reason and many more, **we hold God in our esteem.** When we think of God our thoughts are elevated… and then we are elevated because we are thinking, with esteem, about God.

Now… this is important… the underlying truth of these passages is that *God holds* *you* *in esteem.* God considers you … (as the Psalmist said) just a little lower than God….”

That’s amazing isn’t it? Think that thought… *I am held in esteem by God.* Pull it out again and again … it will change your life! *You are held in esteem by God.*

How might that concept impose itself on all of your self-talk? Hard on yourself – *God holds you in esteem.* Think you are nothing special? *God holds you in esteem.* Don’t know what your purpose is? *God holds you in esteem.*

How will you relate with others when you continually hold yourself in the esteem in which God holds you?

Incredible isn’t it? I think so.

There are aspects of our lives and circumstances that affect us about which we had no choice. You didn’t choose your parents – you didn’t choose your birth family – you didn’t choose your ethnicity nor the country where you born. They are the “givens” of your life, and they affect you throughout your life. But that is only part of your picture.

Another part of the picture is formed by the choices you make.

You’ve seen people who have born with the proverbial silver spoon. You may not think of yourself this way, but that’s you. You have birth advantage. Whether it was wealth or the lineage of your parents or *that you have grasped the miracle of “God holds me in esteem.”*

You’ve seen people with this advantage squander their birthright like the prodigal son. They go through life as though they had been born under a curse rather than with God’s blessing.

You’ve seen people who have been born into disadvantage. They start out with difficulties. There are those who come from challenging origins yet understand themselves as children of God – one of the heirs - held in God’s esteem … and they find peace and joy and prosperity in life.

Our bottom line… the desire of our hearts … is to love and to be loved.

Well… God loves you. God is love. You never know what will happen next, but you can count on love… because you are child of the holy family of love.

You have been given the Holy Spirit of love.

That’s the message of Pentecost.

**Father Richard Rohr** may be familiar to you. He is a Franciscan friar based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was ordained to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church in 1970. He has been called (by PBS) *"one of the most popular spirituality authors and speakers in the world."* He spoke here - for this church.

He is important to us because he can take our historic faith and communicate its essence and character for today.

Father Richard wrote…

*In very real ways, soul, consciousness, love, and the Holy Spirit are one and the same. Each of these point to something that is larger than the individual, shared with God, found everywhere, and even eternal—and then revealed through us!*

The Spirit is the glue that holds the universe together. The Spirit is the connection that we have with all of life – it is always with us, even though we can shut it out … and people do. We don’t have to master theology to have a deep experience of God’s presence and love. Everyone has access, all of the time.

In 2020 a video documentary about **Audrey Hepburn** was released. Simply titled, “Audrey,” you can find it on Netflix and several other places. I’d rather you watch it than try to describe it to you, except for these few words.

Her life wasn’t perfect. She suffered as a child during World War II. She was married and divorced twice.

After an amazing career as an actress she was invited to be an ambassador for the United Nations Children’s Education Fund – UNICEF and she used her movie-star fame, and her heart, to raise millions of dollars to help suffering children.

She said that it was her most important life’s work – but it could not have taken place without everything that had preceded it. She wanted to love and be loved. Then she found her best role in God’s holy family of love.

If you haven’t found it yet – it’s there for you. An esteemed role in the holy family of love.