

**“The Spirit is My Witness”**  
**Acts 8:12-17**  
**A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells**

Prayer: Holy One, we come to you in joy at the love you have shown us. You gifted us with life; you saved us from sin and death through your Son, Jesus; and, you continue to be with us through the Holy Spirit. We do not ask you to be with us each day, or in this hour, because we know you are with us. Rather, we pray you would make us aware of your presence from day to day, hour by hour...in each moment of our lives. Lord, we ask now to learn of you. Open our hearts and spirits to your leading. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts prove acceptable to you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

It’s one of the oldest plot devices in the movies. A character, usually someone who is down and out or nasty and cruel, learns they have inherited a fortune from some long-lost relative. But there’s always a catch. They have to do something like get married or accomplish some feat before a deadline in order to win the inheritance.

In the comedy *Brewster’s Millions*, a minor-league baseball pitcher played by Richard Pryor has to spend \$30 million in a certain way within 30 days to win a \$300 million inheritance.<sup>1</sup>

One of my favorite movies with an inheritance theme is *The Ultimate Gift*. In this story, a rude, self-centered young man named Jason is given 12 tasks to complete in order to win an inheritance from his late grandfather. As he finishes each assignment, Jason learns the value of different gifts like work, money, friends, and education. In the end, he becomes thoughtful and generous person, one who has gained more than a monetary inheritance—he gets a whole new outlook on life.<sup>2</sup>

While there are some true-to-life stories of incredible inheritances, most of these stories fall into the realm of fiction. Still, it makes you wonder:

What would it be like to inherit a fortune?

How would it change the way you think, act, believe?

This is precisely what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Here are Paul’s words:

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:15-17a).

Pause for a moment to digest what Paul is saying here:

- God is our Father, our divine Parent, and we are God’s children by adoption. Adopted children are unique because they have been chosen by their parent (or parents) to become part of the family. Paul is telling us that all who know God through Jesus have been chosen to be part of God’s family.
- Adoption was well known in the Roman world, but not among Jews. Adopting a son—and it was usually a son in order to ensure succession of a family name—gave all the legal rights and privileges of being a natural child of the parents.<sup>3</sup> Through God’s Spirit, we are given a new identity—children of God. We inherit all God has to offer.
- Does this make a difference in our lives? It should. As Paul tells us, we are no longer ruled by a spirit of fear. We should not fear because we have a new spirit, the spirit of adoption, to assure us we are loved by God. One of the commentators I really like is pastor and theologian David Lose. He makes clear what this what this spirit of adoption means for us: “Rather than being afraid—of the future, of what people may think of us, of our status, of our standing with God—Paul invites us instead to imagine a life of

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<sup>1</sup> “*Brewster’s Millions*,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, article online, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brewster%27s\\_Millions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brewster%27s_Millions), accessed 28 May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> “The Ultimate Gift,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, article online, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Ultimate\\_Gift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ultimate_Gift), accessed 28 May 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “Romans,” in Clinton E. Arnold, Gen. Editor, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Volume 3*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 47.

courage, the courage of those who have been adopted by God and invited into the full measure of God's blessings and riches."<sup>4</sup>

What difference does all this make? It makes a difference because the new life God gives us is a life that transcends death, a life that is eternal, a life that is made possible because of Jesus Christ. It makes a difference because God sent the Holy Spirit to live in us and guide us into all that is right and good for us, and for God's world. It makes a difference because God's Spirit confirms for us God's loving presence in our lives and THAT is the greatest comfort of all—God is for us, God is with us, God will never leave us.

This Sunday on the Church calendar is called Trinity Sunday. We worship one God. But we know God as Father, Son, and Spirit—the three-in-one and one-in-three. Now, I'm not going to try an explain the Trinity. Actually, I'm not sure I, or anyone else, could do that because God as Trinity is a mystery, something we humans cannot explain. The one observation I will make is to suggest God as Trinity is simply love shared.

God's love is so great that it must be shared in community and so, God reveals God's self through the Scriptures as one community of love. The love of God flows from Father to Son, from Son through Spirit, from Spirit to Father, and back again. But the circle of love is not complete. Okay, it's not a circle...if you draw it on a piece of paper it comes out as a triangle...so my theological geometry is off. But the wonderful good news is that God's geometry of love is open to one more, and that one more is all of us! This, too, is revealed in Scripture: "For God so loved the world he gave..." (John 3:16).

God is always giving; God's love is always flowing; God's love is always inviting us to join in the community of divine love. And that, my friends, ought to be life changing. That, beloved, tells us who we are: we are God's children, loved by God, born of water and the Spirit, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and made new to become agents of God's love in and for the world. God does not leave us alone to wallow in the muck and mire. God gives us God's Spirit in order for us to soar.

I want to close with a story that reminds us what God's desires for God's children. The story is called the "Fable of the Eagle and the Chicken."

There once was an eagle that fell from its nest, found by a farmer, and taken home where it was raised in a chicken coop. The eagle grew up among the chickens, did all the things chickens do, and believed it was a chicken.

One day, a naturalist came to the chicken farm to see this king of the sky that thought it was a chicken. He was surprised to see the eagle strutting around the chicken coops, pecking at the ground, and acting just like the chickens. The farmer told the naturalist the bird was no longer an eagle but a chicken because it had been trained to be one.

The naturalist knew there was more to this great bird than his behavior showed. He was born an eagle and had the heart of an eagle, and nothing could change that. So, the naturalist picked up the eagle and placed it on a fence and said, "Eagle, you are an eagle. Stretch forth your wings and fly!" But the bird simply looked at the man; then glanced down at his home among the chickens where he was comfortable, jumped off the fence and continued to do what the chickens were doing.

The naturalist did not give up. He returned the next day and tried again to convince the farmer and the eagle that the eagle was born for something greater. He took the eagle to the top of the farmhouse and spoke: "Eagle, you are an eagle. You belong to the sky and not the earth. Stretch forth your wings and fly!" Once again, the bird looked at the man, then looked down into the yard where the chickens were. He jumped from the man's arm onto the roof of the farmhouse, and back to the ground with the chickens.

Still, the naturalist did not give up. He came back the next morning and took the eagle and the farmer to the foot of a high mountain. From there, they could not see the farm nor the chicken coop. The man held the eagle on his arm and pointed high into the sky where the bright sun was beckoning above. He spoke: "Eagle, you are an eagle! You belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch forth your wings and fly!"

This time the eagle stared skyward into the bright sun, straightened his large body, and stretched his

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<sup>4</sup> David Lose, "Trinity B: Three-In-One Plus One!" ...in the Meantime website, May 25, 2015, article on internet, <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/05/trinity-b-three-in-one-plus-one/>, accessed 28 May 2021.

massive wings. His wings moved, slowly at first, then surely and powerfully. With the mighty screech of an eagle, he flew.<sup>5</sup>

Beloved, remember who you are.

- You are like eagles...created by love, for love, and to love...
- You are made new by the love of God in Jesus Christ...
- You are God's children, members of God's family...
- You are meant to soar, borne aloft by the Spirit of the Living God, who is the witness with your spirit that you are children of God...

Remember, this, believe this, live in this love that never ceases to lift you up. In the name of God, Father, Son, and Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> From Jamie Glenn, Walk Tall, You're a Daughter of God, article on internet, <http://www.greatexpectations.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/exp4/FableoftheEagleandtheChicken.pdf>, accessed 28 May 2021.