

## 23/05/2021 Romans 8:22-27 (and Luke 11); Pentecost - Pastor Fraser Pearce

My oldest child, my son Oscar, just had his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

I can remember clearly back to when he was born,

It was on a Sunday evening at Box Hill hospital in Victoria.

The labour had been protracted

- Margaret was induced on the previous Friday evening

So it was a very wearying process – even for me.

Yet on the Sunday evening when Oscar was born there was great joy

*And wonder:*

This little human being was born into the world

For the first time breath entered his body, and he gave a cry

He looked out onto the those around him

With the beginning of understanding: he was alive.

Even if you've never been present at the birth of a baby

I'm sure you can appreciate some of the wonder of new birth

And today I'm suggesting that thinking about a newly born baby

Can help us understand at a deeper level

The work of the Spirit in our lives as baptised people.

Let's listen to the last verse from today's Romans reading:

**Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**

Let's pause first on the word 'Spirit'.

In English, as in the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew

The word for *spirit* can also mean *breath*.

So, in English, as in these other languages

To give up one's spirit means to stop breathing.

Now thinking about our own experience of breathing -

Of taking in and releasing our own breath -

Can give us a clue about the work of God's Spirit in our lives.

When we are born in this world, breath comes into our bodies for the first time.

It comes to us from outside as a gift

And yet we receive it inwardly.

Throughout life we receive and let go of our breath

Until we finally give up our spirit back to God.  
Also, when we are born, one of the first things we do  
Is to use our breath to cry.  
The world is new, we don't have any understanding of it.  
But we *feel* things we don't even have *words* for.  
We cry out, and our breath gives meaning to those around us.  
Our cries speak to our parents in ways that we don't understand.

I was recently at a mums and kids group leading a devotion.  
The toddlers were playing near us, and one of them started crying  
But the mum didn't stir from her chair  
'It's not that sort of cry' she said  
You know: not the sort of cry that means anything serious.  
But all parents can hear immediately the sort of cry that shows  
Real pain or fear or distress  
With *that* sort of cry, the parent understands instinctively  
And comes to the child to give comfort and protection and support.

Listen again to the last verses from the Romans reading:  
**Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**  
Like newborn children, we are naturally spiritually weak and helpless.  
And just as little children simply rely on their parents  
To understand the meaning of their cry  
We too rely on God to understand the sighs and groans  
That the Spirit, the breath of God, makes through us.  
And the Spirit that comes to us through means, from without,  
Through the gifts of baptism and communion  
Through the message of the Gospel as God's word is spoken to us.  
This Spirit, this breath of God, gives us sighs too deep for words  
That move God in his loving will to give us  
The comfort, protection, and support that we need  
To live us people who can mature in the life of Christian love.

Now today I want also to briefly hand on some teaching of Jesus  
That can help us as we *grow* in the life of prayer  
And that reassures us that God wants to give us his Spirit

In our life together as his people.

This teaching comes from Luke 11,

And it's from that part of the Gospel where Jesus hands on to his disciples  
His own prayer: what we call the Lord's Prayer.

This is how the reading starts:

**[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'**

As we grow we spend a lot of time imitating others.

That's what we do especially as children:

We watch what those who have experience of life do,

And we copy them.

Jesus' disciples see him praying, and they want to copy him.

The want to be taught to pray by Jesus, they want to pray as he prays.

Now the interesting thing is that Jesus does not give them a method of praying  
Or even a bodily posture to adopt in prayer

-Although it's clear that bodily posture in prayer was important to Jesus  
And his disciples.

Jesus, instead, gives his disciples *words to pray*.

Being give actual words to us: this is very human: this is how we learn.

As children especially our parents speak with us

And give us words to use as we move from crying to speech.

Our Lord gives the words that he himself used to pray to his Father.

And the first thing he taught us in prayer

Is to, together, call on God as our Father.

Why do we call God Father?

Because Jesus does.

We stand with our brother Jesus, and call to God our Father.

And as St Paul says earlier in Romans 8

It is by the Spirit that we call God 'Abba', 'Pappa', 'Father'.

And whenever there is a baptism in this congregation

We together hand on Jesus' prayer to those who are baptised.

We teach our new brothers and sisters to pray with us

And to call God 'Father'

To show that we are indeed members of that true family

Of which human families more or less reflect the glory.

Jesus knew well that earthly Fathers, even the very best ones,

Fall well below the mark of what true Fatherhood means.  
And so in case we think that he is encouraging us  
To take our own experience of human fatherhood  
And simply project that on to the living God  
Jesus immediately gives a way of thinking  
That opens us up to understand the great generosity of God.

Listen to what Jesus says: **'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.'**

First we have this great, universal promise of God.

Everyone who asks receives from God.

Everyone who searches will find God.

To everyone who knocks, God will open the door.

Then Jesus gives us these words: **Is there anyone among you who, [literally, What father among you] if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'**

Jesus is here speaking to his disciples

And says *to them*, of their *fatherhood*,

**'If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children...'**

Even the best of human fathers are evil in relation to the true Father.

And yet even human fathers know how to give good gifts to their children.

And what, according to Jesus, is the gift the Father has to give?

**how much more will the heavenly Father give the *Holy Spirit* to those who ask him!'**

This most precious gift of God, Jesus assures us, the Father wills to give us.

And indeed does give us, as, day by day we ask God for the true breath of life

So that we can mature as his dearly loved children.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Since there is no condemnation

For us who are in Christ Jesus

And since nothing can separate us from the love of God in him.

Let us live by the Spirit, receiving as gift the life of holiness

That comes through faith in Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen!