

SERMON TITLE: "Reviewing Romans: The Spirit of Life"  
SERMON TEXT: Romans 8:1-11  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: August 13, 2023, at First United Methodist Church

### **INTRODUCTION**

On July 3, 2002, Steve Fossett landed his hot air balloon in Australia, earning the record of first solo hot air balloonist to encircle the globe. Fossett had tried many other times, but had been foiled by technological problems, weather difficulties, or political complications. But finally, in 2002, everything came together, and his goal became reality. After his big accomplishment, Fossett's record-setting Spirit of Freedom balloon was taken to the Pioneers of Flight gallery of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. There, the Spirit of Freedom balloon was hung next to the Spirit of St. Louis, the airplane that Charles Lindbergh flew when he became the first person to cross the Atlantic Ocean in an airplane.

Those two famous spirit-named crafts came to my mind this week as I was thinking about what to preach about today. I thought it would be good for us to spend some time this summer reviewing the Apostle Paul's New Testament letter to the Romans. This epistle contains a lot of basics of the Christian faith. So that's what we're going to do for these four Sundays. Today we begin with this text from Romans chapter eight, where Paul is writing about the record-setting "Spirit of Life," made famous by the heroic deeds of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Unlike the one-person sized vehicles of Fossett and Lindbergh, however, the Spirit of Life has enough room for all of us. So, this morning, I invite you to climb aboard for this most amazing spiritual journey. Let's take a ride on the Spirit of Life.

### **1—FREE FROM SPIRITUAL PUNISHMENT**

As we lift off in the Spirit of Life, one of the first things we notice is that we are sailing free from spiritual punishment. As Paul writes in Romans 8:1, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." One of the most obvious advantages of flying with Jesus is that he has taken the rap for us.

When God came to earth in human flesh and then died on the cross for our sins, Jesus essentially paid the price for our misdeeds. Jesus took upon himself the punishment which should have been ours, so that we would no longer be tied down by guilt, shame, and death.

Living without fear of punishment is an amazing relief. The terrible fires in Hawaii this week remind me of some bad wildfires in Colorado years ago. The conflagration was so bad that firefighters came from other states to help. One crew was from LaGrande, Oregon. They fought valiantly to put out the fires around Rifle, Colorado. Then, when they were driving back home to Oregon, the exhausted driver made an error which caused them to have a fatal accident. Five firefighters died immediately, and six more were injured in that terrible event. The 21-year-old driver survived to feel the horrific burden of guilt. The folks back home in LaGrande could have pressed criminal charges against her for her driving error and probably could have ruined her life forever. But they decided not to. They thought she had suffered enough. They were willing to forgive.

That's a taste of the relief from condemnation which is offered to us by Jesus. When we go with the Spirit of Life, we are free from spiritual punishment.

## **2—FREE FROM THE SINFUL NATURE**

When we adventure with the Spirit of Life, another advantage is that we become free from the sinful nature. When we climb aboard with the Savior, we are telling the sinful nature to take a hike and leave us alone. When we are journeying with Jesus, Christ is our powerful ally to ward off temptations and protect us from all manner of spiritual trouble.

Of course, we all know that even Christians can fall back into sin. Sometimes we are like the guy who was “the head of an anti-violence group [and] was arrested for punching a referee during his 7-year old son’s flag football game.”<sup>1</sup> Our talk is better than our walk. We violate our own principles. We fail to live up to our faith. Unfortunately, the sinful nature is something that can travel with us, wherever we go. Like too much baggage, or a castaway troublemaker, sin tries hard to come along for the ride.

But, generally speaking, **IF** we are traveling with Jesus, participating fully in the Christian adventure, then we are going to be a lot farther ahead than we would otherwise be. Our attitudes and behaviors are going to reflect more of the beliefs, values, and teachings of Christ **IF** we choose to fly with Jesus and the Spirit of Life.

Freedom from the sinful nature is possible because of the motivational power that comes from Christ's love and forgiveness. As Paul says, we are motivated only so far by rules and regulations. Laws tell us what we are and aren't supposed to do. But laws alone don't give us the power to overcome sin. For that kind of motivation, we also need the love of Jesus.

I guess it's kind of like the idea of carrots as well as sticks. Some of you know that one of my pastoral responsibilities for the Mountain Sky Conference is that I serve as the chair of the Board of Pension and Health Benefits. In that capacity, I'm familiar with all the ways we try to motivate our conference clergy to practice healthy habits. Every year, we try to persuade every clergyperson on our health insurance plan to get an annual physical, to do their blood lab tests, and to fill out a health questionnaire. One of those healthful tasks comes with the threat of a stick. If not completed, the clergyperson will be punished with a higher deductible on their insurance in the following year. The other two items come with positive financial incentives. If completed, those tasks can earn the clergy some money in their medical savings account. Sticks *and* carrots. The law can push and prod and punish, but sometimes some positive motivation is needed to get us to do what is right.

That's where Jesus and the Spirit of Life come in. When we hear the words, "For God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten son," we can't help but be moved. When our emotions are stirred by divine compassion, when our faith is inspired by the stories of Jesus, when our hearts are cleansed by the blood of the cross, then we are empowered beyond where the law of sin and death could ever take us. When we lift our voices in songs of praise and feel the rhythm of gospel tunes, we are propelled away from the sinful nature and moved forward into the Spirit of Life.

### **3—LIFE BEYOND THE BODY**

A third benefit of traveling with Jesus is that the Spirit of Life takes us beyond the limitations of our mortal bodies. Like a time machine that can defy the limitations of age and physical abilities, the Christian journey will take us past death and into eternal life. In Romans 8:11, Paul says it this way: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”

Our church’s upcoming event of going to a Raptors’ baseball game reminded me of an old baseball story. A couple decades ago, there was a news story about Ted Williams, who played his whole career for the Boston Red Sox. He has been considered one of the greatest baseball hitters of all time. When Williams died in 2002, his son decided to put his father’s body on ice. Through the process of cryonic freezing, the son planned to extend his father’s legacy into the future. The son hoped either to restore his father back to life in a future year or that someday someone would pay the son big money for his father’s athletically-abled DNA.

Well, cryonic freezing is definitely not where we’re going with the Spirit of Life. The kind of life Jesus offers isn’t held in frozen, icy limbo. The kind of life Jesus offers is as complete and wonderful as the divine fullness of God’s very being. When we believe in Jesus and travel with him in the Spirit of Life, we can look forward to joy and beauty beyond our imaginations. Whether we dream of streets of gold, banquet tables overflowing with food, young and healthy bodies, expanses of green pastures, reunions with our loved ones, or answers to all life’s questions—we can expect that life with God will be even more satisfying than that.

We can think of that final destination the way this hymnwriter did:

On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand, and cast a wishful eye  
 To Canaan’s fair and happy land, where my possessions lie.  
     O’er all those wide extended plains shines one eternal day;  
     There the Son forever reigns, and scatters night away.  
 When I shall reach that happy place, I’ll be forever blest,  
 For I shall see my Father’s face, and in his bosom rest.

I am bound for the promised land, I am bound for the promised land;  
Oh, who will come and go with me? I am bound for the promised land.<sup>2</sup>

When we travel with Jesus aboard the Spirit of Life, our adventures will take us far beyond anything we could imagine or experience in these mortal bodies.

### **CONCLUSION**

Some of you remember a former member of our church. His name was Mac McClary. By the time he became an active member of FUMC, Mac had given up his hot air ballooning. But, in his past, he had flown his balloon many, many times. Ballooning was a big part of his life. I still remember the photo on his funeral bulletin that showed Mac with his hot air balloon.

As I think about these verses from Romans 8, I can almost hear the Apostle Paul's voice coming out of Mac's mouth. Come on, climb aboard for a wonderful adventure. Climb aboard where you can gain freedom from spiritual punishment. Climb aboard where you can be free from the sinful nature. Climb aboard where you can find life beyond your mortal body. Accept the loving and forgiving invitation of Jesus our Savior. Climb aboard the Spirit of Life.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homiletics*, (July-August 2002), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Stennett, "On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand," 1787.