

Written Copy: Peace in the Midst of Affliction-Romans 5:1-5

3rd Sunday in Lent

March 15th, 2020

Text: Romans 5:1-5 (Greek Translation)

¹Therefore since we have been justified (declared to be acquitted of all offenses and have been conformed to God's perfect standards) due to faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ²Through whom we also have gained and retain intimate access by faith into this grace, in this we continue to stand firm and continue to exalt proudly in the sure and certain hope/expectation of the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we are also proudly exulting in the affliction that makes us feel as if we are without options to change things, knowing that this affliction is achieving as it's result endurance, ⁴ moreover the endurance is achieving a tested and approved character, and this approved character is achieving hope;⁵ Indeed the hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Exegetical Statement

In the Gospel we are declared to be something that we are not and could never be on our own: justified-right with God. We stand before Him with no offenses that would anger Him or move Him to declare eternal punishment upon us. This right standing comes from Jesus work of obedience: His life by which He obeyed the Father's will perfectly, through His suffering and death which earned for us forgiveness of our sins since He suffered the punishment due, and His resurrection which declares what our eternal future will be. Because this comes from outside of us, we can have peace within our troubled conscience because Christ had made peace between us and the Father. If this peace was something we had to earn through our works than we would never have peace, since we could never know if we had done enough to cancel out all the continued disobedience that is our daily life. Because Christ made peace between us and the Father we can come into His presence as His precious children and receive all the gifts of grace He promises to us in His word. Faith makes us able to stand firm in that these promises made to all who believe are for me-applied to my life. And for this reason, we can rejoice, give thanks, and sing praises to our LORD even when we are in the midst of affliction. We can rejoice because God promises He uses affliction to draw us closer and keep us in faith. The Spirit who was poured into our hearts and lives in baptism opens our eyes to the reality we can't see: that the Lord is there walking us through these times of affliction and carrying us when we falter.

Focus Statement:

Christ's suffering and death done out of his great love for us declares that we are what we could never be on our own, in right standing with Him and that we have peace with Him. So that the affliction that comes is not punishment but is used by Spirit to create and sustain the faith that makes all Christ did on the cross and in His resurrection for me. It is the power to hold fast to the truth of His love for me even when things look the opposite.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

When times of affliction come, such as the Coronavirus, which we have no control over we despair and accuse God of losing control over our lives. We see any loss incurred by affliction as meaning God no longer cares for us or loves us. The devil seeks to use this fear and hopelessness to drive a wedge between us and our Savior.

What the hearer should do as a result:

When affliction comes confess the fear that seeks to rule our hearts and minds and through Word and Sacraments let the gift of faith draw us closer and hold fast to Jesus declaration from the empty tomb that we are have peace now in the midst of affliction and eternal peace to come.

Subject Sentence: Faith produces Peace in the Midst of Affliction

Had the COVID-19 not come along I'm not sure what I would've been preaching on this morning. Any previous plans I had for the readings we have today were kicked to the curb as the events around us and in the world have unfolded. Like you, I am amazed at the panic and fear that seems to have gripped much of the nation, including our own neighborhood. People panic shopping. People worried that there may not be enough toilet paper to go around for the next couple weeks, so they need to stock up, not even thinking that the amount they are purchasing will last them beyond what they would ever need. While toilet paper is at the center of the panic buying frenzy, it's not the only commodity people are stocking up on. Our secretary Carey Onore told me that her weekend shopping trip at our local Meijer's showed that they were sold out of other things as well: milk, eggs, bread, canned meats and tuna fish, canned soup, Deli lunchmeat, frozen vegetables, bananas and other fruit, paper towels, and hand soap. Now the canned meats and soups, and frozen things can be bought now and stored for a while. That's the kind of stockpiling I remember growing up when the fear was nuclear war, and people were stockpiling supplies for their bomb shelter. But milk, eggs, bread, and bananas? How long will that stockpile last? The bread you can freeze, but not the eggs and milk. And yet, with hearts ruled by panic and fear, people bought more than they really needed, and in doing so left nothing for those coming after them. Nothing for the elderly that can't easily get to the store or those living on a fixed income. If these hoarders had any thought beyond themselves it was "Too bad for them. They should've gotten here earlier." A heart ruled by fear thinks only about its own needs and cares, not for the needs of others, or about the wisdom and logic of its actions.

People are afraid of COVID-19 because in the grip of fear they are not considering the facts that we do know about this disease. When the media reports the number of people infected with a running tally, a heart seized by fear hears these numbers as if all who are infected will surely die. But out of the 2,836 reported cases in the U.S. only 57 have resulted in death. That means COVID-19 has a mortality rate of 2%. In comparison the Coronavirus called MERS (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome) that appeared in 2012, which most of you never heard of, has a mortality rate of 34%. The fact is 80% of the cases of COVID-19 infection have turned out to be mild. But since there is no flu shot available to prevent me from getting it when it comes around, I realize that my health is out of my control. And as we talked about last Wednesday, fear rules our heart when we pull Christ off the throne of our lives and install things that shouldn't be there, that don't have the power to rule there, such as ourselves. I can stockpile toilet paper and feel I've got a handle on surviving this crisis, only to realize that my stockpiling is useless if I actually get sick. So, what's left for me to do except shut myself in the house, lock the doors, bathe myself in hand-sanitizer and wait for the collapse of society as we know it. Fear makes us distrust everything and everyone including God. Fear wants us to see the Coronavirus as beyond even God's control. Or that He's had enough of us sinners, and has decided it's time to thin the herd. Otherwise why would he allow this to happen in the first place? Why doesn't He just take this plague away?

Instead of letting fear rule our lives we need to give the top spot back to Christ. We need to replace fear with the gift from God that is much stronger, and that is faith. We need to once again see ourselves as God sees us. We are poor miserable sinners who struggle to trust in Him to care for us, and thus need Him to take hold of the reigns of our lives both when

crisis arrives, and even when everything appears to be fine. The truth of how God feels about us is plainly revealed in **Romans 5:8** “**but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” Jesus didn’t wait for us to come around and say “I guess I was wrong to take your place in my heart and life. Here, I give it back to you.” That’s because on our own we cannot and will not admit that. Instead He came down from heaven to earth and took on our human flesh so that the mighty Creator God who (**Psalm 95:4-5**) **4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. 5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land**” became one of us, so that he could experience death for us. Christ came as a gift of love from the Father, a love that was stronger than our sinful disobedience and our desire to have the top spot in our lives. He came to take from us all the ways that we make ourselves enemies of God by loving ourselves and our earthly life more than He. All the ways we put our wants and needs as more important than our fellow man. He took all those acts that are our declaration of war and insurrection against our Creator God and paid the ultimate price to remove them on the cross. In His suffering and death, He shows us, and the whole world, that His love is far greater and far stronger than our sin and our fear. He suffered, died, and rose again, so that we can know that all the things we say, do, and think, that would cause Him to declare us His enemies, are gone. He holds them against us no more. He poured out His anger and punishment on Christ at the cross, so there is nothing left to pour out on us. Jesus has taken it all away, just as He testified with His dying breath: “It is finished.”

Romans 5:1 declares the truth about how we now stand before the God of the universe, “**Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Faith is Jesus’ gift of love as **Romans 5:5** tells us: “**God's love has**

been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Through the Gospel message, through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit is poured out into your life. He brings to bear that powerful love that Christ demonstrated on the cross, as He lived not to save Himself, but died for those who did not love. People just like you and me. That supernatural love is poured into your heart and into mine, and it changes us forever. It makes our heart the worthy receptacle of faith, God’s gift that takes what Christ has done for all men and makes it for you, and for me. It is that faith that declares us to be justified in the presence of God. We stand in His holy presence and all that would cause Him to cast us into eternal hell has been removed from our record. We stand before Him with no offense that would separate us from Him. Instead we have His loving gift of grace that declares us to be what we could never be on our own: His precious children, whom He loves and cares for with a love far stronger than our fear. **Romans 5:2** declares **“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”** Even as fear has crept into your heart and my heart over these last several days, the gift of grace that is the continuing love and forgiveness we have in Christ allows us to stand nonetheless in the presence of our Father. And that faith He gives us the ability to put our hope and trust in His love, and not ourselves. It protects that hope from being lost no matter what we see going on around us.

So, what is God’s purpose in allowing such scary things to enter our lives such as the COVID-19? The devil would love to use it to feed your fear, with the goal of you pulling Jesus off the throne of your life, and letting fear rule the day, which ultimately means Satan is ruling. But through the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word we see a much better goal. **Romans 5:3-4** ³ **More than that, we rejoice in our**

sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, We can rejoice in what we must suffer, even as COVID-19 makes its way among us, because we know by faith we still stand in the presence of our loving God, who has promised to provide for us all that is needed for this life. That gift of daily bread is not cancelled but will continue to come, and we can hold on to this as truth by faith. As we endure through this crisis, the God who is greater than any disease will show you He is still here, giving you the strength to endure despite the temptation to fear and to doubt. He strengthens your faith through His Word and Sacrament. That's why our coming together for worship is such an important thing right now. We need the strengthening of faith that He provides through the means of grace. And as He strengthens your faith with His continued presence and His working in your life, He works in your heart to build up your character. He is at work to change your heart and mind so that you see things from His Son's point of view. So that the way in which you react to this crisis is not by doing what is best for you, but what is good, right, and salutary in the eyes of our Lord by sharing His unselfish love toward your neighbor. He moves us to stop making our own personal survival the most important thing, and instead think about how we can help and show love to those who are less fortunate. How we can help and show love to those who couldn't get to the store in time to get the last roll of toilet paper, the last gallon of milk, the last can of tuna fish. And as He does this work in your life and mine, He strengthens our faith in Him, so that we can endure through other tough times like these that may come our way. So that no matter what disease strikes us, or what shortage of supplies might cause fear to grab hold of our lives, we can know by faith that God is still in control. And that He

calls us His precious children whom He always will provide for their needs, even in the midst of COVID-19.

When we pull God off the throne of our lives and take His place, fear will be the end result.

If it's not COVID-19, then it will be some other event in our lives that will show us that we cannot handle things on our own. The result is fear takes hold and causes panic to rise. And

when it does the place to turn is not in on ourselves and feed that panic, but to the

promises in God's Word that we hold by faith. That **(Romans 5:8) "but God shows his**

love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus death on the

cross is His demonstration of the love He has for us. And that **(Romans 5:5) God's love has**

been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. And

the Spirit's presence and the work He does to change our hearts through the love of Christ

is ours by faith which He creates in us, giving us the power to hold fast to the truth of

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God

through our Lord Jesus Christ. No matter how things may look in the world or in our lives

as this virus spreads, the Spirit testifies to the truth that we stand justified-made right with

the Creator of the Universe, through all Christ has done for us in His death and

resurrection. No longer His enemies, we are declared to be His precious children. He is far

stronger than any virus or plague. And He will provide what is needed for us to continue to

be His Church even in the midst of this outbreak. And when our time of service is done, not

according to the overruling power of any virus, but as decided by the LORD God who gave

us life, He will graciously welcome us home. May this be the assurance and faith that rules

your heart in Christ Jesus, now and forever. Amen.