

Written: Romans 5:1-5 “Love and Forgiveness Beyond Understanding”

2nd Sunday in Lent

Sunday, February 25th, 2024

Text: Romans 5:1-5

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.² 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.³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

The text’s intent

To assure us of the wonderful and powerful gift of grace we have through faith in Christ. Through Christ against whom we have a multitude of sinful charges against us, we are declared to be innocent of all of them. By my faith I am declared to be in right standing with God now and remain in right standing through the Spirit’s work in me. Out of the greatest love Jesus took my sin and its punishment to clear the table for me. With nothing held against me I am established in a peaceful loving relationship with the God who before faith my actions declared me to be His enemy. Therefore, the afflictions that come are not His wrath being poured out but are actually used to produce and strengthen Christian character in me and achieve an increased hope in His continued love and presence now, and my hope in eternal life to come. And that hope is shown to be worthy by the supernatural love of Christ to die for me who was beforehand His enemy. He pours that love into my heart and life through my baptism and keeps it alive through the Gospel. So I can rejoice proudly and boast that I have been reconciled with God, not by my own doing but the gracious gift that is Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection for me and the gift of faith worked in me by the Holy Spirit.

Focus Statement:

Paul gives me the assurance that all of my sinful charges have been dropped and I am declared innocent through my faith in Christ. His shedding of His blood took care of God’s call for justice against sin. Through the faith worked as gift of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel I am declared to be in right standing with Him now. That means the afflictions suffered are not His wrath, but He uses them to grow my faith and Christian Character. His love poured into my heart to give me the hope of His presence now and eternal life to come. My faith in Christ has reconciled me and continues to do so even as I sin.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

Peter moves from the position of blessed confessor in Christ to being called Satan. He goes from promising to stand by Jesus regardless of arrest and imprisonment to denying Him. I move from worshipping and praising Him to disobeying Him time and again. For this I deserve to be called His enemy, suffer His wrath, and to be cast out of His presence and cut off from Him forever. This gives the devil fodder to make me question my faith relationship with Him.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Rejoice in the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus and given through baptism. Hold fast to this as a sure and certain hope despite what the guilt in my heart fueled by the devil might try to convince me.

Subject Sentence: Peace with God to rejoice in sufferings.

Introduction: Peter: Golden Boy to Enemy of Christ

Poor Peter. We see him in action in our Gospel Lesson doing what Peter seems to do best: move from star pupil to being accused of being in league with Satan. We see him go from one of the highest mountaintop moments to a deep dark valley. And if you're like me you can see a lot of Peter in yourself too.

Let's face it, it doesn't get any better than to have Jesus ask for the correct answer regarding His identity: "Who do you say that I am?" and to be able to give the perfect answer from the Holy Spirit, "You are the Christ!" meaning the Anointed One, the Messiah, the One promised long ago who was sent to save us. That kind of response should've given Peter more than a star on the forehead. It should've earned him the place of prominence in front of the rest of the disciples, maybe even as the guy they could go to when they didn't understand what Jesus was teaching them.

And one of those hard-to-understand teachings of Jesus quickly followed. Having correctly been identified as the Messiah, Jesus begins to teach what that will mean for His ministry. It doesn't involve what the disciples were envisioning, a continuing healing, preaching, performing of miracles for years to come while evading the opposition from the religious leaders. It doesn't involve marching into Jerusalem and wresting power from Jewish ruling council and the Romans. It doesn't involve Jesus ascending to sit on a throne in Jerusalem. He begins to teach them that His role as the Messiah means that when He gets to Jerusalem He must be arrested, tried and found guilty before the Jewish and Roman leaders, suffer horribly, be put to death, and rise again on the 3rd day.

Now whatever Peter had in mind for the remainder of Jesus ministry, suffering and dying was not part of it. It does not compute for him. Peter feels he needs to set Jesus straight on what the Messiah is supposed to do. He pulls Jesus aside and tries to straighten Him out on what the plan going forward should be (at least in Peter's mind). Peter actually thinks he needs to rebuke the Christ, the Anointed One from God. Not a smart idea really. In fact, what Peter is doing is sinning. Jesus responds by rebuking Peter in a much stronger way. Jesus says to him "**Get behind me Satan!** You are thinking and judging according to ways and desires of sinful man, and not the will and plan of the Lord. Anytime we substitute our will in place of God's will, that is sin. Anytime we do that we are actually working for the devil's cause of thwarting God's will. Jesus tells Peter, "**Quit following Satan! Get behind me. Follow me in what I say and do.**" How badly it must've hurt to have Jesus call him "**Satan**" in front of the others. How far he had fallen from his God-given confession. How badly he had sinned.

But Peter would go on to do worse. He was on the mountaintop of his own making when, during the Last Supper, he responds to Jesus warning that Satan wanted to seriously attack and try to destroy his and the other disciples' faith. Peter responds with a bold promise that was beyond his means to fulfill. He tells Jesus that he will most assuredly never leave his side. He Peter is ready to be arrested and go to prison with Him if that's what's bound to happen. It will be only a few hours later that Peter sees how sinfully wrong that promise was. He is convicted of how far he had fallen into sinful disobedience when he finds himself fulfilling Jesus prophetic warning. The rooster crows and Peter has not only denied that he is a follower of Jesus but denies that he even knows the man! Peter hears his denial, meets the eye of Jesus who is bound and already suffering abuse at the hands of the chief priest and his men, and remembers Jesus words. Deeply convicted of his sin, and with his heart broken, Peter runs out into the night sobbing.

Our Situation: We Sin Like Peter and Doubt His Forgiveness

Have you ever had any Peter type moments in your life? Moments when you see yourself as a mature Christian with great understanding, one who has got it all together. And the next moment you realize that you really don't have it all together. You become convicted that in ways you never realized, or perhaps didn't want to realize, you've been following the desires and plan of your sinful selfish heart. You've been putting yourself first in the way you manage your time, talents, and treasures, and ignoring God's call to serve Him and those around you in love and obedience.

Or when you've been given the opportunity to witness your faith in Christ to someone else and you shy away from it. There may come a time in your life, if it hasn't already happened, when you are asked if you believe and follow Jesus, and you shy away from answering. Or you do answer but feel that weird sense of guilt and shame when you do, because you fear people are going to make fun of you. Maybe it's a time when the Holy Spirit is presenting a clear window of opportunity to share your faith; a time when someone is struggling with issues in their life, and they are looking for answers. Instead of sharing how your faith relationship with Jesus helps you, speaking to Him in prayer and listening to Him speak in His Word, you give them worldly advice instead that avoids the subject of faith. Maybe it's our unwillingness to do something as simple as pray in public when we go out to eat for fear of what others around us will say or think.

After admonishing Peter, Jesus goes on to tell the assembled crowd that is following Him as well as His Church today, that we all must pick up our crosses and follow behind Him. What are these crosses? They are the ways we are called to live that stand against the way the world lives. Do we ever shy away from carrying the cross of living differently from the way the world does? Do we ever adopted and follow what the world says is important instead of what Jesus calls us to witness to with our words and life?

When you are convicted concerning the times you've follow your sinful nature and the world instead of following Jesus, do you ever struggle with the idea of being forgiven? It can be especially hard when it's a sin you've repeated before, something you're struggling with. You know how it is when someone wrongs you and greatly offends you, how hard it can be to forgive them. Even if they exhibit genuine remorse and sorrow, it's still hard to forgive them without any conditions attached. We respond, "I forgive you this time" with the unspoken condition, "Next time may be a different story." Or we forgive them, kind of, but we don't forget. We are always ready to bring the offense back up at a later opportune date.

That is how our human nature works. So when it comes to our sinning against God, when we feel we've greatly offended Him, it's hard for us to understand and believe that He can and does forgive us. But He most assuredly does.

Paul Tells Us to Rejoice in the Gifts of Faith

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul in our Epistle Lesson gives testimony to what it means when you are told you're forgiven by God through faith in Jesus Christ. He tells you that because of your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior you are justified before God. What does that mean? It's a courtroom term. Picture yourself standing before God the judge against whom all sin is committed. And you and I have a huge table full of tagged evidence bags with our name attached to them. Each one of those are things we are guilty of thinking, saying, and doing. They have our name on them, and there is no denying we are responsible. And each one of them, if we are found guilty, means the sentence of death: separation from God now, and when our life in this world is over separation and suffering for eternity. God is just: sin must be punished, it cannot just be forgotten and swept under the table. It's a hopeless situation and there seems to be no way out.

But along comes Jesus. He came for you, for me, and for all men, He took each one of those evidence bags and crossed out your name and wrote His own. He committed no sin so that He had nothing on that evidence table which had His name on it. Yet out of love He made each one of your offenses against God, each one of your sins His own. It's why He underwent our baptism. In your baptism all your sinful offenses were washed off you and onto Him. All your sins became His. The verdict for those sins is suffering and death, and He took your place, suffering and dying for your sin. And He rose again as proof of the verdict that is handed down to you by faith, not guilty, forgiven. Since you now have nothing on the evidence table with your name on it, you are declared by God to be acquitted of all charges. You are justified in His sight, "just as if you never sinned." You are in right standing with the judge of the universe.

Jesus' resurrection states the truth that is yours because of your faith: you go free. You go free, not as someone reluctantly forgiven by God, but as one who is at peace with Him. When it comes to Peace with God, it's more than just a feeling. It's more than just knowing He is no longer going to punish you. It describes the ongoing relationship of love that we have with Him through the indwelling Holy Spirit. He is always there for you, always there in your corner.

Romans 5:2 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.

That is His amazing gift of grace. And Paul tells us its not just a one-time thing at our baptism. As you live out your life in faith toward Jesus Christ you have continual access to that gift of grace. Your sins, even as you commit them daily, are assigned to Jesus and are taken care of on the cross. As quickly as you commit them the evidence bags are changed from your name to His. As we study God's Word we see our sins multiply, as we see the ways we offend God that we never realized before, along with those ways we continue to offend Him. And in response that grace which is His gift to you by faith abounds even more. It continues to cover all of your sinful offenses. Because of that, rather than living out our lives in fear of His wrath or judgment now, and on the Last Day we live with the joyful hope of His glory, as manifested by His gracious gifts to us now, and the best gift that is yet to come, eternal life. And that should change how we view our life now.

How We Should See Suffering Based on Peace With God

Romans 5:3-5 ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Jesus tells us that our lives lived in this fallen sinful world will not be easy. Because it is a fallen world where things do not work as God originally designed them to, we have to deal with crime, hate, sickness and disease, and death. There will be those times when the cross that is our living out our faith in Jesus becomes heavy in a world that doesn't appreciate our faith and stands opposed to it. There will be times of suffering: times when we feel problems and trouble pressing down on us like a weight that is too heavy for us to lift off of us, too heavy to keep on going at times. In these times we are to know and believe that these things don't mean we've been abandoned by our Lord because He has had just about enough of our sin. Remember: by faith we continue to stand in His grace.

The Holy Spirit who is God's gift of love to you continues to live in you and is at work in you through all of these difficult things. He works to make your faith stronger as He helps you carry these burdens and affliction. And at just the right time according to God's will and plan He lifts them from your shoulders. He works to keep your faith and hope alive in God as your ever forgiving and ever-loving Savior.

Conclusion

As we see in our Gospel Lesson Peter messed up big time. But Jesus didn't tell Peter to get out, but to stay and get back in line behind Him, following Him. You and I mess up big time too, repeatedly. But He doesn't tell us to "Get out". He doesn't banish us to everlasting torment or remove His presence from us. His Spirit uses God's Word to point out the ways we've fallen out of line in following behind Him. And then He focuses our attention on the wonderful words of the Gospel that we have from Paul. Because of the Spirit's gift of faith given in baptism, we continue to stand justified before our God, just as if we never sinned, even though we have. All of those sins were put upon Jesus who willingly went to the cross to suffer in your place.

That might leave you to wonder how He could do that for you and I who are poor miserable sinners. It doesn't always make sense to us. That's where faith comes in. Faith holds fast to this Gospel truth given in **Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Jesus willingly gave His life for those who sin and disobey Him. He even died for those who will never believe in Him. It's this love, the love which surpasses all human understanding. And He has that love for you, every day of your life, all the way to eternal life to come. And by that love poured into our hearts we can begin to love and forgive others, even as He has forgiven you and me. Amen.