

Sermon on **Romans 5:1-8** for 4th Sunday in Lent – 3.22.20

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Is 40). Grace Mercy and Peace are yours from God our Father through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is God's judgment. This is God's judgment. In his good and gracious will for mankind he allows, even sends these calamities upon the earth. For the unbeliever or the lax Christian it is a defibrillator call to repentance. For the believer who trusts solely in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation and by the Spirit's power working through the Word and Sacraments not only is this a reminder that each day is a day of repentance, this is the weight room of our faith, the track upon which our faith must walk, run, sprint and sweat until it is stronger, can endure more and learns always keeps its eyes up and on the prize. How do we know God's judgment is good and loving for us? The apostle Paul tells us.

While we were still sinners, Christ Died for Us.

Romans 5:1-8 *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* This is God's Word.

When will this be over? When will we be able to resume life as we were accustomed to know it (seems so long ago)? Will the economy rebound? Will our personal finances and life rebound? Will we lose many or only a few? How long will this go on? So much uncertainty as we watch the news, as we read up online, or listen to the opinions of those we can talk to about it. So much stress and anxiety as workers in the medical field wait for it to hit or worry it's hitting already, as newly minted homeschool teachers are fired and students expelled, while we pray for actual teachers to transition on a dime to distance and online learning. Birthdays, Showers, Weddings, Anniversaries are celebrated without as much fanfare and family. Events are cancelled. Commencements, sports seasons, business, trips, friendship, opportunities missed. We just don't know when it will end, but Paul says we can be certain, *"we have peace."*

The peace Paul speaks of is not hunky-doriness in this life, or a problem-less existence. Paul gives us confidence for that life to come and for life right now in this world filled with turmoil, stress and fear. *"We have peace with God."* It is hard to believe since by nature all of us think that we have to earn our way back to God, we have to prove we are sinless – an empty dream which did not work when we were 5 years-old and caught with our hand in the cookie jar, and it does not work now as we have time to think and we realize more and more our sins of thought, word and deed, and many others know them as well. We can't even make things look right. We cannot make peace with God. But God has. We can be sure of it. *"Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* It is not something we do. It is something Jesus did for us with his perfectly lived life, his innocent death bearing our sins and shame, and his resurrection from the dead for our forgiveness justification. It is the gavel swing of the judge saying – "You are not guilty." Justification is a court room term. The confirmands I teach know to slam their fist down when they hear that word, "Justification" – "Not guilty." You are forgiven and free. You sit in that courtroom and God says, *"justified," "not guilty."*

And as we get up stunned in that courtroom of God's justice that we sinners go free, he gives us Passion-Priority-Purpose in this crazy life. *"through whom (him) we have gained access into this grace in which*

we now stand, and we boast (rejoice) in the hope of the glory of God.” We are children of God. We have joy despite the trouble that comes because we have a sure and certain hope that we will be and enjoy the glory of God. We haven’t experienced it yet. That why it is *“hope,”* but it is certain because we have access to this grace through Jesus. We stand in it. We, though sinners, are knee deep in grace. We have it. We have peace.

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” We don’t just see God’s love to us in the absolution, in hearing of our forgiveness, receiving the supper, remembering our baptism. Now everything is evidence of God’s love for us, even our sufferings. I know, it doesn’t make sense to our natural reason, neither does God’s love for us.

God gives us many nice blessings and gifts in our lives, there is no doubt about that, but he also makes *suffering* good for us. The word has the picture of something pressing down upon us, like a weight that would seek to crush us, but God strengthens our faith through his Word and sacraments. We bear up under it and we get better at it – more patient, calm, more collected, even joyful even though panic is all around us.

And if we are the ones impatient, angry, stressed out and fearful, then we need this more than ever because it pushes us back to God’s Word, works repentance in our hearts and sends us back out there. As we *persevere* and grow, God builds our *character* – our ability to operate and trust God’s plan and to be confident with what God is doing in all this hardship. We are tested time and again and are approved. All this ends up in that same place – *hope*. We have a certain *hope* because we know God is at work. Why? Because we know he loves us. *God has poured out his love into our hearts* like a pitcher filled to the brim with his promises, peace and presence. The Holy Spirit has been given to us and given us hearts to believe and hold his promises like a rain barrel with gutters funneling it in.

How can we be so certain? Don’t look in at how much you believe or how little. Don’t look in at your works or lack of them. Don’t look in. Look to up to Him. In the sports world I was always told to keep my eyes and head up. When squatting with weight on your shoulders, if you keep your eyes up, your back straightens up, your shoulders naturally go back, and you target the right muscles. You grow. When tackling in football, you keep your head up you don’t miss your opponent and you don’t drive your head into them possibly injuring your neck. You are safe. In your spiritual life it’s the same – keep your eyes up and on Jesus. You’ll grow and you’ll be safe in him.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” That means you – powerless to help in any possibly way and as Paul says, ‘ungodly.’ By nature you would have rather spit on God than worship him. *“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.”* Even in our day and age if the person is a qualified righteous person, still we hesitate to give our lives for theirs – often we don’t. And if there is a good cause or we feel duty bound to help someone or we owe them something – it’s still difficult. How about enemies? No way! Keep your eyes up on Jesus. *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* God’s love is different, isn’t it?

This is God’s judgment, isn’t it? God judges us “objects of his love.” He makes us heirs of eternal life and ties himself to us to help us in every need and deliver us in this life and to the next. Now even the hardships, persecution, plagues and afflictions he uses to refine us, build us up and strengthen us. He gives us peace with God through Jesus. And we have joy even at times like this. He gives us strength to bear up. He gives us proof of this forgiveness, peace and purpose now and an eternity of his love and peace in glory. *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* This is God’s judgment – he loves each and every one of us. Amen.