

The Second Sunday in Lent
March 12, 2017
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Romans 5:1-11 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.

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

“Real Hope for Real People”

We like it when people tell us what we want to hear. It's so much easier that way. But easier than what? Easier than facing reality, unfortunately. That's why, as much as we appreciate friends who tell us what we want to hear, we truly value people in our lives who can be honest with us. What do you think of this outfit? I wouldn't wear it in public. I'm thinking of getting a new haircut. It might look nice on that model, but it would be a disaster on you. I'm thinking about trying that new fad diet. Don't do it. You'll be miserable and you'll make everyone around you miserable. Brutal. But honest.

Honesty can be refreshing. Lent gives us a chance to be more honest and transparent about ourselves and all of humanity. Not that a time of repentance and more rigorous spiritual preparation are especially present. It's just that we recognize we need it. We'd love to have non-stop smiles plastered on our faces and find rainbows constantly spreading across the sky. But that's not reality. So today, I would like to be real with you. Actually, I'd like to share with you the honest and transparent words of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 5 about the realities of the Christian faith. He begins by showing us our real status as children of God and the blessings we have in Christ. He addresses the real struggles we face. And leaves us with real hope. He's just being real about life. We get real hope for real people.

Paul begins Romans chapter 5 with this statement: **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Romans 5:1 ESV) That word “therefore” always builds off a previous point. It could be the verse right before this or the chapter or the entire book of Romans up to this point. In this case we don't have to backtrack very far to figure out what Paul is talking about. In the final verse of

Romans chapter 4, Paul writes: **“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”** (Romans 4:25 NIV84) So today, let’s start by being real about Jesus. In Mark chapter 8 Jesus is trying to be real with his disciples about his suffering and death. They don’t get it yet. But eventually they will. The death and resurrection of Jesus give us the status of acquittal before God.

That allows us to be real about ourselves, our status, who we really are. Since we are innocent in God’s eyes, that is a huge relief. Fear and dread at facing God are gone. We have peace with God. But peace isn’t the only benefit we get from this innocent status with God. Paul continues: **“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.”** (Romans 5:2 ESV) We are free to approach God without fear of getting kicked out or invoking his anger. We have access. In addition to peace and access, we also rejoice in hope. We have more to look forward to. We have a future with God that fills us with a triumphant, confident rejoicing in God.

All of it is based on the reality of Jesus’ finished work. We have peace. We have access. We have hope. It comes **“through our Lord Jesus Christ...Through whom we have also obtained access...and rejoice in hope.”** (Romans 5:1,2) And because we have those things through Jesus, we get joy for life. That allows us to be real about the things we actually experience in life. The Apostle Paul is realistic about life experiences: **“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”** (Romans 5:3,4) We will suffer. We will experience pain. That is part of life. The Bible says we can expect it. That’s just reality. But because of what we have in Jesus Christ, we can still rejoice in the middle of those struggles. The realistic experiences of life work themselves out in our lives of faith. They produce hope in us.

Does that sound realistic to you? If I’m honest with myself, I usually end up with the opposite. I could rephrase it this way: I get disappointed with life; because suffering produces impatience; impatience exposes my true character; and my true character shows my disappointment. Sufferings show us what is wrong with life. Troubles give us cause to gripe and complain and rage against cosmic injustices of the universe. Life, real life, leaves me with disappointment.

I have this expectation for my life as a Christian. My feelings tell me how I’m doing. I rely on my gut to tell me whether I’m on the right track in life or not. I evaluate my life of faith based on how well I can respond to encouragement from God’s Word. I find my value on my track record of measuring up to God’s instructions and commands and demands. I should be able to grow. I should be able to get better. I should be able to be stronger. I should be at a different level of faith by now. I would love to have that perseverance, character and hope Paul describes in Romans chapter 5. By when I look realistically at my life I’m disappointed. I’m disappointed with myself. I’m disappointed at the gifts I see. I’m disappointed with an apparent power outage from God in my life. But it is a disappointment based on my hope. My fabricated hope is shattered by my reality. And if you are like me, you wrestle with your own disappointments. We have these expectations for our spiritual life and spiritual

progress. We can be worse than some of our friends with the best intentions. We tell ourselves messages constantly. But so often they are out of sync with God's plans for us.

And that's one of the things that stings about life. An honest and realistic view of life has to have some answer for pain and suffering. That's actually one of the biggest reason why people abandon the Christian faith or refuse to believe in the God of the Bible. How can we make any sense of suffering? Let's get rid of any nice-sounding sayings that are useless in the real world. Let's move beyond senseless suffering. Let's move along and allow God to speak for himself. Let's let God address the reality of real life with real suffering.

No matter how we feel about ourselves. No matter what we think about God. This is God's reality for your life: **"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."** (Romans 5:5) God's love? Can God be serious about love while we are feeling the squeeze and symptoms of real life? Absolutely. God is absolutely realistic about what you are going through. But God is the only one who has an honest answer to it. Only in Jesus do we see a purpose for suffering. The purpose of his suffering is the only way to make sense of suffering at all.

On September 30, 1938 British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain arrived back in England after discussions with German Chancellor Adolf Hitler. Together they had signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement demonstrating their mutual desire to avoid war. To reporters gathered outside his official residence, Mr Chamberlain remarked: "I believe it is peace for our time."¹ Peace was a nice idea. It was a noble goal. But it was complete fiction. Within a year both France and the United Kingdom would declare war on Germany after Hitler's continued aggression and invasion of Poland. The declaration of peace had been a useless piece of paper.

The Apostle Paul shows us the reality of God's love for us isn't just wishful thinking or naivety. The reality of God's love is based on the suffering of Jesus: **"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."** (Romans 5:6) The love of God goes well beyond any human example or expectation. Here's how wide the gulf is: **"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:7,8) God doesn't love you because of your near-perfect track record in your life of faith. He loves you because you haven't. God doesn't meet you half way in your spiritual quest or consider it good enough that you have made enough effort or progressed far enough or achieved a pretty good level of faith. When you were powerless, God chose you. When you would just as soon spit in God's face, he gave up his dearest possession. For you.

God is realistic about humanity, about your weakness, about your godless hopes. God's love in sending His Son to die for you makes even the most noble and heroic sacrifices in human history pale in comparison. Jesus shows the ultimate act of love in his ultimate sacrifice.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_for_our_time

This real love gives you the basis for future hope. You have your feelings. You have your struggles. But this sacrifice of Jesus gives you a realistic foundation for all your experience with God: **“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”** (Romans 5:10) This isn’t a matter of wishful thinking. It’s not appeasement. This is a transformation of the relationship between you and God. You are reconciled to God. The love of Jesus demonstrated in his suffering and death changes your relationship with God. It changes your life.

Resting on Christ’s accomplished work gives power for living. You are able to face life, real life because of this reality of your status with God. Paul explains it this way: **“More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”** (Romans 5:11) You will face troubles. You will experience suffering. And through it all, you can face it all with confidence through Christ’s victory.

Now you can base your hope for life on the reality of God’s reconciling love in Christ Jesus. Hope comes through character built up by perseverance coming through suffering. Hope looks to Christ when we feel weak and powerless. Hope depends on God’s grace regardless of what comes to us in life. Martin Franzmann says that the Christian “sees the present as the stairway to future glory and resolutely climbs the stairs one by one by the light that falls on them from the opened door at the head of the stairs.”² Here is your purpose in suffering. Hope rests on Christ. In the middle of living your real life you are blessed with Peace, Access, and Hope.

What’s more refreshing than a God who tells you what you want to hear? Our God is better than our best and truest friends. God is transparent about struggles and failures. He is open and honest about your hope. But most refreshing of all is the honest message of who you are in Christ. Your hope in life rests on the reality of your Savior’s accomplished work for you. Jesus is your hope. That hope is real. Amen.

² Concordia Commentary: Romans (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968) 89.