

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

14th June, 2020 – Second Sunday after Pentecost

ROMANS 5:1-8

GRACE, FAITH AND PEACE

The Grace, Faith and Peace of God be with you all. Amen.

Sometimes you read something in which some key words or phrases really stand out for you; they might make you think, give you comfort, or perhaps even raise more questions than they have answered. For me this Bible reading we have here today, Romans 5:1-8, is just like that. I ask you now to read it again, and see if there are any words or phrases which really jump out at you here?

Please read Romans 5:1-8

How did you go? Did any words or phrases really stand out for you in there? I'd love the chance to share them right now with you, but of course I can't. You might like to share them with others now or later. There is a lot in this reading, and in so many ways it sums up our Christian faith and our relationship with God. Let's have a look at it in more detail.

Listen to this sentence again; 'Christ died for us at a time when we were helpless and sinful.' (v. 6) In that one short sentence there is so much, isn't there? 'Christ died for us at a time when we were helpless and sinful.' In the first place, Jesus died for us when we were ... helpless. In other words, there was and is nothing we can do to earn His love. In the same way that we unconditionally love a baby who is born into our family long before we know anything about what they will be like, God loves us, so much that He has already sent Jesus to die for us. Really important here; nothing we did then or do now can earn God's love.

Although, as we look at the second half of this verse, perhaps the example of our love for a new baby isn't a great comparison, because God did know something about us. He knew that we would be sinful. He knew we would rebel against Him. He knew we would bring Him heartache. He knew we would think our way was better than His. He knew we would sadden Him. And yet, in a love which is far beyond anything we can understand, what did God do? Listen to it again in

verses 7 and 8: ‘⁷No one is really willing to die for an honest person, though someone might be willing to die for a truly good person. ⁸But God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful.’

This is the Gospel, the Grace of God, the Good News of God’s love for us. We can’t earn it, we don’t deserve it, but it is given to us. And then when we go back to the top of this reading, in verse 1, we see how this Grace comes to us: ‘By faith we have been made acceptable to God. And now, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God.’ We receive God’s Grace solely through our faith. And, as we reflected on again last week in looking at the Trinity, and the week before in celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, even our faith is a gift to us from God. So, everything about us being forgiven, being made right before God, having our relationship with God restored, it is all the result of God’s loving work in wanting to bring us back to Him.

The result of this, at the end of this first verse? We live at peace with God. Again, not the peace the world can give, but the peace which knows that all is well, our relationship with God is restored, things are as they ought to be. At times like we are going through right now this peace can be a real comfort, can’t it? Not only are we adjusting to the restrictions of what we can and can’t do, where we can and can’t go, but these restrictions continue to change and evolve. Add to this the anxiety we may feel due to businesses or jobs being under threat or already lost, the heartache for family and friends we can’t be with, uncertainty about the long term impacts of this pandemic on us, our family, our friends, our society, our nation, and our world; we need God’s peace now as much as ever. And, because of all He has done for us in Jesus, we know that just as God promises us His peace, He now invites us to come and live in it also. It is ours, because of who He is and all that He has done.

I’m guessing also that many of you had another part of this reading pop out at you as well. For me a part that always sticks out are four words here in verse 3: ‘And we gladly suffer’. What is that? Who actually ‘gladly suffers’? What does that mean? In the past, and I am sure still today, some Christians have interpreted these words to mean that the more we suffer for our Christian faith,

the more hard times we go through, then the more we prove our faith and even earn our way into God's love. But other parts of this reading we have already looked at, let alone other parts of the Bible, tells us that this isn't possible.

Let's then have a look at these three words in their larger context, verses 2-5: ' ² Christ has also introduced us to God's undeserved kindness on which we take our stand. So we are happy, as we look forward to sharing in the glory of God. ³ But that's not all! We gladly suffer, because we know that suffering helps us to endure. ⁴ And endurance builds character, which gives us a hope ⁵ that will never disappoint us. All of this happens because God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love.'

Think about what is at the beginning and end of this section: 'we take a stand on God's undeserved kindness', and 'God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with His love'. Again, the focus all comes back to God, and what He does for and through us. So, it doesn't mean that we seek to suffer. It doesn't mean that we are a better class of Christian the more hardships we go through; and I have heard that one before. It does mean that having our Christian faith, trusting in God, will not see our life then automatically being easy.

But God has promised to be with us, and He will give us that peace we talked about just before, so that whatever go through we know He is with us. He gives us the strength and the hope to go through whatever happens, and He carries us when we need His help. And, even more than that, just like metal is refined and strengthened by being put through a fiery furnace, so too the Holy Spirit works in what we go through to give us those qualities of endurance, character and hope because of our faith. And how can we be so certain about all of this? Because, to go back to where we began, 'Christ died for us at a time when we were helpless and sinful.' (v. 6) God's love, God's strength has been, is, and will be with us always.

Our Christian lives are very much about Grace, Faith and Peace, as Paul sums up so well here in this reading from Romans. We don't earn God's love, but neither can we do anything to lose it. All of God's gifts come to us solely through our faith, which is itself a gift from God. And now we

have a peace which comes from knowing that, through Jesus, our relationship with God is restored, and that He is now with us both helping us and shaping us in whatever we go through. Amen.

Prayer: Lord God, we praise you for your grace, we thank you for our faith, and we live our lives in your peace. Remind us that you are always with us, both helping us and strengthening us, in everything we go through in our lives each day. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

The Grace of God

‘God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful.’ (v. 8a) God’s Grace is the free and undeserved gift of His love and forgiveness; we can’t earn it, we can’t repay it, we can only live in it.

- What comfort does it give you to know that God’s relationship to us is one of Grace?
- Can you think of any other relationships which are similar to this, at least in part? If so, how might they not quite live up to the Grace of God?
- Do you sometimes struggle with this concept of the Grace of God, the free gift of His love? Why do you think this can be a hard concept for us to grasp and accept? What is it about our human nature which can cause us to either reject this Grace, or to turn it around so we believe we can do something to either earn or keep it?

By Faith

‘By faith we have been made acceptable to God.’ (v. 1a) Even our faith, which enables us to know and experience God’s love and grace, is a gift from God; ‘God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love.’ (v. 5b).

- What does your faith mean to you?
- Are there ever any things which threaten your faith?
- When your faith does feel weaker or under threat, in what ways can you open yourself up to allow the Holy Spirit to work in you?

We Live at Peace

‘Because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God.’ (v. 1b) Peace with God comes not only because our sins are forgiven, but because our relationship with God is restored.

- What threatens your peace, both in our current situation and in normal times?
- What is the ‘peace of God’ to you? Do you have an image, a feeling, or a word which describes it?
- Have you had an experience when you felt the peace of God at a time when you really needed it?

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