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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 25, 2015
3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Numbers 24:10-17, Matthew 11:25-30

Hymns: 364; 373; 370; 50:1 (238:3-5)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Making sense out of life –

I can't tell you how many times this comes up in pastoral visits, especially with those who are seriously ill or have a loved one who is ill or has been taken by the Lord. "Why?" is the most common question: "Why have I become sick?" "Why did my loved one die?" From our human perspective in which we are so limited in how much we can see it is hard for us to make sense out of life,

especially when it hurts. If only Jesus could touch us with His healing love the way He touched and healed so many during His public ministry! If only we could know the Lord's glory in this way for ourselves!

But then the Lord speaks to us in His Word, and instills faith in our hearts so that we have a better grasp of how and why God directs things in the world the way He does, and why He might allow certain problems to come into our lives. **Making sense out of life** comes down to comprehending --

THEME: The Blessings of Justification.

The first blessing mentioned in our text is that

I. We have Peace with God.

A proper understanding of justification is part of the bedrock of our faith. And so our text declares of us

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

To be justified in one's life means that one has no guilt associated with him, that one is pronounced absolutely innocent. The first verse of our text speaks of being **justified by faith**. We are not justified because we have never done anything wrong. Far from it. We have sinned, and confess that we still sin in thought, deed, and word. Neither is it possible for us to do enough good to balance things out, making up for the wrong that we have done. It just doesn't work that way. The law doesn't make allowance for doing wrong as long as we do some nice things too. Not even man's law with all its imperfections allows for that. How could we really think that a holy God, who cannot ignore sin, and in whom there is no sin, could make such provision for sin and its nastiness.

No, we are justified by faith, not simply a faith that there is a loving God in heaven, but faith in the one viable plan to provide us with the righteousness we need for eternal life. In the verse immediately preceding our text Paul summarized that plan with these words:

Romans 4:25 “*Jesus* was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

Jesus paid the price of our sin when He offered Himself upon the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin, perfect in every way. He was the perfect sacrifice because there was no fault or sin in Him, no blackness at all. He was the perfect sacrifice because as the Son of God His blood was precious enough to be the ransom price for all: for all **people**, for all **time**, for all **sin**. He paid the price for us, and passed through death before us, that He might rise again from the dead. The Lord reveals that Jesus’ resurrection is a bold statement of God’s satisfaction with the price Jesus paid. He assures us by Jesus’ resurrection that we are justified. **Grasping this truth by faith this justification becomes our own**, and we fully benefit from this grace so that we might know, “**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit**” (Rom. 8:1).

“No condemnation” states a wonderful truth that assures us that God is not punishing us now, nor will He in the future. Indeed the blessing we are granted without reservation is **PEACE! We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**. When we feel something less than peace in our relationship with God that feeling is not coming to us from God. It is coming from the devil, and from an ill-informed conscience. You see the devil likes to encourage us to sin in our own weak areas, just so he can accuse us, accuse of sin, accuse us of hypocrisy. He wants us to doubt our faith and our state of grace that we might think, “No true Christian would do what I have just done therefore I must not be a believer. I have been only fooling myself!” He likes to raise doubt in our minds and hearts about that peace which God declares to be a fact. When we grieve over sin in this way then let us recall the words of John in his first epistle, “**if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God**” (1 John 3:20-21). That is God’s will for you, that you should know His peace, and His fatherly goodness and love. He would assure us that --

II. We have Access into this Grace.

Romans 5:2 “Through *Christ* also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Access to the seat of power is such an amazing blessing that comes to us because of our justification. People in this world go to great lengths to gain access to the President of the United States, or other heads of state, even of minor countries with very little power. They want the influence that can be found by such access. If one has the ear of the president, or some other head of state, one might get consideration for their interests that otherwise would not be possible.

Such access doesn't even begin to compare to the access that we have because of the justification that we have through faith in Christ. Jesus is there at God's right hand. Jesus is there to speak in our behalf. Jesus is there and so the Father is willing to hear **us** as we approach Him in Jesus' name. Not only is the Father willing to hear us, but **He wants to hear us**. He who knows better than we do what is good and right for us, wants to hear what's on our mind and burdening our heart. He wants us to pour out our hearts to Him in prayer, because we are His children, justified by Jesus' merit. More than that, He promises to act upon our requests, whenever our requests are in accord with His gracious good will for us.

We need so many things, I mean really need things that are spiritual, and not just material. When we turn to our Father in heaven we have access to Him who can make a difference. We ask for forgiveness every day, because we need forgiveness every day. We are assured that when we repent of our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When we ask for a greater faith, for an extra measure of the Holy Spirit, a blessing we all need, He promises to grant us that blessing. When we pray for the kingdom of God to come that others might believe and hope for the glory of God, He grants that with His grace. Yes, in all our need, in all our trials and tribulations the Lord is there for us, and that is Paul's assurance for us as a blessing that comes with our justification:

III. We have Hope in the Face of Tribulation.

The Apostle Paul leads us to this conclusion through some inspired theological reasoning.

Romans 5:3-4 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

This statement starts with something that we might find difficult to grasp, in fact if we take the opening of this statement alone we might wonder about our personal faith because we might think “I don’t glory when tribulation strikes my life.” No, I haven’t made a pastoral visit, not one in many years of ministry in which I encountered a seriously ill member or one who had lost a loved one to illness or accident or crime, and found them giggling with joy because God allowed a difficult trial to enter into their lives. And that is not what the Apostle Paul is saying.

We glory in tribulations when we accept it as coming from a loving Father in heaven. We glory in tribulations when we submit to the will of God in our lives, knowing that He will see us through the evil day, and that indeed He will always use the trials that come upon His loved ones to bring a blessing, a spiritual blessing to them. Paul confidently asserts in the eighth chapter of Romans:

Romans 8:28 “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

When we are led by the Spirit of God to trust the Lord to bring good from all our troubles in this life, then we do gain **perseverance**. We know this because of the truth at the beginning of our text. We are justified. God has absolutely cleansed us of all guilt. We are at peace with God through Christ Jesus our Lord. So He does not deal with us according to our sin, but according to His grace. That confidence of faith stands up to the trials of life. As we go through life we are assured of this truth time and again, and we also see His deliverance and care. That is what we recognize in others as **Christian character**. We see trust and confidence in the Lord grow stronger as Christians mature in the faith. Oftentimes this becomes more apparent as Christians age, but it is also evident in younger Christians who have leaned on the Lord and found Him

to be their strength. **Character produces hope.** Paul teaches us more about hope in chapter eight of this epistle, a lesson we do well to remember.

Romans 8:23-25 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Hope isn't about wishing for something that might or might not happen. Neither is it an escape from reality. It is the grasping of the reality that is yet to come, a grasping of faith that comes to us from the Holy Spirit. It is a most precious aspect of our faith while we abide in this temporal life that is so filled with futility and vanity, of things that perish and disappoint. Our text assures us:

Romans 5:5 Now hope does **not** disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Hope does not disappoint, because it is not a figment of our imagination, nor is it what the unbelieving world refers to as “pie in the sky” dreaming of deliverance. It is what we already know it to be, a fruit of the Spirit of our God who has been given to us, who poured God's love into our hearts. We know the love of God that has been revealed to all the world in Jesus Christ our Lord

This is where we come to the conclusion of **making sense out of life.** Jesus surely has touched us with His glory and His grace. Surely, we cannot now clearly see it all for now we only see an imperfect reflection of what the will of the Lord is for us. Our spiritual vision is still clouded by our reason and the weakness of our flesh in the confines of this temporal world which has been corrupted by sin's curse. It is as the Apostle Paul declared in –

1 Corinthians 13:12 “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”

However faith does grant us a grand insight into the wonders of God's love and grace toward us, and we are assured that the Lord does have all things working together in our lives to that ultimate glorious end of our being with Him in the glories of heaven. Yes, with faith's grasp of **justification** through the merits of Christ, we can make sense out of life, because, no matter what may befall us, we know that the love of God is abiding with us, and we live in His peace.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.