

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Trinity Sunday -- May 23rd, and 26th, 2013

Romans 5:1-5. 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 rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (NIV – 1984)

Dear brothers and sisters who worship the true God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Trinity Sunday has been called “the preacher’s nightmare.” Think about that for a moment: how does one understand the utterly incomprehensible? How does one describe the utterly indescribable? How does one explain the utterly unexplainable? It is impossible! If you are trying to accomplish these goals as a preacher, you are doomed to failure! You can see how this might keep a preacher up at night!

To avoid any nightmares for the preacher or listener; I could just say “Amen” here and we could go home. Today we celebrate the festival of the Holy Trinity, and so we consider a topic that can never be fully understood, described, or explained. Thankfully, those things are not our goals today. Yet, there is a reason that such a festival is included in our church year. As we consider the Holy Trinity, we do not seek to understand or describe or explain. Rather, we listen to God speak about himself in his Word. There we find comfort. There we find joy. There we find peace. As we consider these words in Romans, we hear our Triune God say,

Sermon Theme: We Have Peace!

- 1. Because of the work of our Triune God**
- 2. Even when we struggle in this world**

What is the work of our Triune God that brings us peace? In a word: Salvation! He has seen to every detail. As one divine being, he acted for his people and continues to do so, from the first move in the plan to its final delivery. Salvation is God acting for us. As we examine the saving work of the Triune God, we will see how each person of the Trinity leads in specific areas of that work.

What is God the Father’s role? We think first of creation. That impression comes initially from the Apostle’s Creed, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth.” But already at the beginning, we see our need for salvation. Immediately following creation came the Fall into sin. Urged on by the devil, mankind brought sin into the world against the Father’s will. From there, we were lost, separated from God, in need of salvation. That salvation would have to come from God.

So where can we find peace? Paul tells us, **“Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.”** We are justified, declared not guilty of sin. By whom? The unspoken answer is God the Father. He is the one who credits righteousness as we hear in Romans 4, **“God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”** How can this be? The righteousness, and following it the peace, comes to us through the plan that the Father prepared. As the first verse of chapter 5 continues, **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

The Father brought peace about by sending his Son. So, what is the role of God the Son in bringing us this peace? Again, consider first our need for peace. The Father demanded holiness, but all of our deeds and desires are desecrated by sin. The Father demanded blood as payment for sin, but our blood would be a polluted payment. Sin made us God's enemies. We deserved an eternal death sentence. That sentence is the eternal fire of hell. How could there be peace?

We turn toward God the Son and see his work for us. We hear, **“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.”** The war is over. We are reconciled. We now stand in a state of grace, living under God's love care and protection. We have peace with God. How does this happen? The Father's demands were met through a substitute. Jesus, God's Son, took our place under his Father's wrath, as Paul says, **“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.” [2 Corinthians 5:19]** We are at peace with the Father because of the Son, because in our place he lived his perfect life and died his guiltless death.

But, all is not yet well! How does this peace come to us? How do we receive the benefit of what took place 2000 years ago? Jesus has bought peace, but how can we get it? What must we do? A good deed? A decision? A lack of resistance? What? It has to be something! If it were any of these, how would we ever know if it were really ours? We would always wonder if we did it right!

That brings us to the third person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. What is his role? The Holy Spirit is the one who brings the peace worked by the Father and the Son to us. He connects Jesus' cross to your heart. How does he do this? The blessings of salvation come through the channel of faith. Certainly we see that here, **“we have been justified through faith...we have gained access by faith.”**

The Holy Spirit works to produce and strengthen faith in our hearts. He does this through the Means of Grace. He uses his own special set of tools: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. This Gospel, the good news of forgiveness, connects us to our Savior's cross, no matter how many years, miles, or cultural barriers separate us. From alpha to omega, the mysterious Trinity has worked out our salvation, and so he says, “Peace be with you!”

What cause for comfort! What cause for joy! We welcome that peace with God. That peace remains a fact although we struggle in this world. “We have peace with God.” Peace is the end of hostilities between enemies. We were enemies of God because of sin, but not anymore. We have been reconciled in Christ. This leads then to peace of heart and mind. The peace in our heart means that we know that our sin is forgiven. The peace in our mind means that we need not fear punishment, judgment, or even death. Rather, we are friends of God.

2. Even when we struggle in this world

When the hostilities come to an end, doesn't that usually mean a time of calm and quiet? Does this peace mean good times and easy living? “Peace be with you!” That must mean our fight is over. That must mean we will only see what seems good to us. That must mean that our Christian life will be one of ease and relaxation. That must mean that we will always have a smile on our face. When you hear “Peace be with you,” isn't that what you think of? How nice it would be to have a peace like that! We may even begin to think that now we truly can “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

But then we hear, **“We also rejoice in our sufferings.”** How can suffering be a cause for rejoicing? That statement is contrary to our expectations and to anything we would want to happen. Yet

Paul clearly says, **“We rejoice in our sufferings.”** Why? The answer is not immediately apparent so let’s take a moment to consider it.

He says, **“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”** A Christian who suffers learns how to hold on. That person understands that they are not in heaven yet, and so they know that they still desperately need the Lord. That person learns to look to the Lord and trust him for deliverance. So the Lord uses that suffering to draw us ever closer to himself.

We are told that this “perseverance” then builds “character.” When I hear that, I think of the common answer that parents give to their children. Many times a parent will tell their child to do something they didn’t really want to do, and they will ask “why.” It is not uncommon for the parent to answer, “It builds character.” Who wants to hear that! But, the idea behind character is this: one has been tested and has passed the test. Our Memorial Day weekend offers a good thought to illustrate this idea. With whom would you rather go into battle: the veteran who has seen combat many times and survived or the newbie who has never seen the field? The veteran has what Paul calls character. It inspires, strengthens, and survives, and what a blessing it can be!

Finally, “character” produces “hope.” “Hope” is patiently waiting for God to keep his promises. **“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts.”** God loves you. He will always do what his best for you, if that means “building character”, even if that means taking you to his glory in heaven. He has your best interests in mind. God is love and will deal with you in love.

Knowing this certainly brings peace to our hearts and minds even though you may struggle in this world. That peace of heart and mind comes from knowing that because of the work of the Triune God you have peace with God. That peace with God that resounds through eternity leads you to strive to follow what he says, even if the way forward seems thorny and narrow, will be sprinkled with blood or sweat or tears, or even passes through the valley of the shadow of death. Your Triune God is at work to keep his promise that even suffering is used to bring you closer to him, and so he comforts you with the words, “Peace be with you!” Amen.