

***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.*

In the cabinet of many kitchens or the bottom drawer of many hallways sits something called emergency candles. You know, they are those candles that are saved just in case the electricity would be out for a long time. They are for those times when a flashlight can not be found, and the family has been left in total darkness.

If the lights never go out for extended period, these candles never are used as their manufacturer intended. They just sit forgotten, stored away. In many homes, they often collect dust. But if the lights go out and all other sources of light are gone, then those candles become the most precious item in the whole house. Then do those candles get to do their work. Then do they get to shine and bring light.

Our text for the day for this Trinity Sunday comes to us from the fifth chapter of the book of Romans. Paul has been explaining for the first four chapters of his letter to the Romans how man can be justified in God's sight. He has told them that to get right with God, no amount of human activity could do the trick for "all have fallen short of the glory of God." But yet one can get right with God. How does one become justified in the presence of God? Through Christ and His activity alone. Only through His action on the cross and empty tomb can one be right with God. Paul assumes this understanding as He begins our text. In fact he says, "Therefore, since we have been justified, we have peace with our God." You see until Christ gave His life for our sins, there was enmity between

us and God, that is to say we were enemies. Adam's sin and all other subsequent sins had driven a wedge between God and us. But when Jesus came, He reconciled us to the Father. Therefore, through His death, now we have peace with our Father. We have peace that gives us access to His free grace. And not only have we been brought to peace through Jesus we have also been brought to hope in Him as well. We know that since our Lord brought our salvation to completion in Jesus, He will also take care of everything else we need and eventually deliver us to our eternal home. Our text says that we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. In other words, we rejoice knowing that one day all things, including ourselves will be brought to complete perfection in heaven. One day all things will reflect perfectly the glory of God.

The next part of the text is perhaps the hardest to understand or at least to agree with. Paul says that as Christians we should rejoice in suffering. I don't know about you, but I don't know too many people that try to get as much suffering in their life as possible. No one raffles off suffering. And certainly Paul doesn't tell us either than we should try to bring suffering upon ourselves. But what he does tell us is this: Suffering, when it comes, and it will, is an opportunity for hope to shine.

Paul tells us that through suffering comes perseverance. In others words, as we suffer as Christians we learn how to lean on God in order to make it through. That perseverance then works character. The more often that we have to lean on God, the more natural that posture becomes. Suffering makes us into people that realize that leaning on God is something we should always do and not something to be saved only for times of trouble. And finally, that character works hope. Trusting in God makes us long even more for His promises to be brought to completion. We long for those days of complete

perfection in heaven. Indeed, suffering brings to light hope.

This truth is evident to me in my daily conversations as a Pastor. When Christian people suffer, they also hope. They hope for healing, they hope for endurance, and they hope for final and complete release from their failing bodies in heaven. When I talk to people at church who have relatively little suffering in their lives, our talk is rarely about heaven and the glorious restoration granted there. But as I sit in hospitals or homes with people who are suffering greatly, we often talk quite naturally about the hope of heaven. Suffering makes us realize that if our hope is in this world we are very unfortunate indeed.

Hope is like emergency candles. When things are going well, we often forget that we have it. When things are going well, the hope of heaven is too easily replaced by the hope of things in this world. Hope is something that Christians have that often sits in the background during good times. But when the lights go out, and no flashlight can be found, the hope of Christians begins to shine. That hope that we have in Christ of a far better future with our Lord is that which breaks through the darkness of suffering we endure. It is that hope which shines past the hurt to our risen and Ascended Lord. It is that hope that focuses us despite the gloom of pain on our end in heaven with Jesus.

We rejoice in suffering not because we like suffering, we rejoice because suffering gives us an opportunity to hope. It gives us occasion to dust hope off and let it glow. It gives occasion to find hope in our bottom drawers and bring it to its proper use. It gives us reason to grab hope off the shelf and light it. Suffering gives us an opportunity to hope.

Many people blame all sorts of things on suffering. They claim that their temper

or their lack of patience is a result of that which they suffer. But truly suffering does not make one have a bad temper or to lack patience. Rather in suffering, we learn truly what kind of people we are. For a Christian, when suffering arises, hope should spring up.

But in order for this to happen, we must not only wait for suffering to arise that we might hope. We do not wait for trouble to begin to rely on God. In fact, it has been well said that to work on hoping during suffering is not the right time to do such a thing. Rather in times of lesser suffering, we must meditate wholly upon God's goodness to us, in order that when suffering comes, we will not question it. We must ponder God's righteousness and justice so that when suffering comes, we will not question the fairness of such a struggle. And finally we must let linger in our minds the promises that God has made in order that when suffering comes, we might not despair, but hope.

For all too often we do not use the blessed times God gives us in life to strengthen our relationship with God. Each of us must confess that in different ways that we have often times tried to do without God during the blessed times of our lives and then have been surprised when sufferings comes and we feel quite unprepared. We today ask God's forgiveness for our failures. And He of course grants us that forgiveness for Christ's sake. And He reminds us that He has given us great reason to hope. He has broken down the wall between himself and us which we placed there with our sin. He has removed that wall with the power of Christ's death and resurrection. And He lifts our eyes us again today to Heaven that we might see, believe, and hope in that promise.

God the Father desired for us to be at peace with Him. God the Son accomplished that peace through His death, and now God the Holy Spirit keeps that peace ever in hearts that we might always have reason to hope.

We have been given a Triune hope which will not disappoint in times of suffering. Therefore, if suffering comes, and it will, we are ready to rejoice in it. For while the suffering itself will not be pleasant, we know that through it God will cause us to hope. Amen.