

THE MESSAGE

February 14, 2010

Romans 5:1-11

The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller

Our Peace

A few years ago, a magazine published the results of an interesting survey. The editors asked 16 prominent Americans what they did to find peace of mind in the midst of our stressful world. Author James Michener found peace of mind by walking his two dogs along deserted country roads. Barry Goldwater found peace of mind in his hobbies: boating, hiking, and flying. Walter Cronkite preferred solitude, usually by “going to sea in a small boat.” Sammy Davis, Jr. looked for the good in others as a way to find peace of mind. Bill Moyers said he found peace of mind by attending family reunions, preferably those held in out-of-the-way places.

When looking at these responses, three things come to mind.

First, nearly everyone found peace in the natural world. One way to get out of the rat race is to retreat into God’s creation. That’s what Jesus often did.

Second, this survey seems to reveal a universal desire for peace. And every person has a different way to achieve it. No doubt, finding peace is a worthy goal for every one of us. Jesus said he offers a kind of peace that surpasses all human understanding.

Third, none of the answers in that survey related peace to worldly things like money, or fame, or success, or power. When great people seek peace of mind, they don’t turn to society to find it. They turn away from it. That’s exactly what Jesus encourages his disciples to do, in order to go back into society and share the good news of the Gospel.

How many of you here this morning would like to have more peace of mind? Wouldn’t we all? Consider your answer to this question, *what do you do to find peace of mind?* Now ask yourself this question, *what does my answer have to do with my relationship with God?*

In today’s Bible reading from Romans, Paul writes about the ultimate peace... (*Read Romans 5:1-11*).

Paul says, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ.” Paul talks a lot about the word *justification*. It means “to declare that we are right with God.” Imagine a courtroom setting when the verdict of “not guilty” is declared by the judge. Justification is the act in which God declares us “not guilty” even though we are sinners. God declares us “not guilty” because of what Jesus did on the cross. He transforms everything. Jesus paid our bail, our fine (so to speak...) with his very life.

I don't know if anyone asks this anymore but when someone would ask me, "Are you saved?" I answer proudly. "Yes! I was saved the day Jesus died on the cross." That's the day when you and I and all humankind were saved. That's when we were made right with God – justified.

Our justification for existence, our reason for being depends not on us or what we did (or will do), our justification is the result of what Jesus did on the cross – period! And that has made all the difference in our lives as baptized disciples of Jesus.

Every week here in worship we participate in a time of confession and forgiveness. Every week, we acknowledge that we fall short of God's expectations of us. We are sinners. Every week, we hear the words that we are forgiven and set free because of what Jesus did for us. When we hear the words, "you are forgiven," it means: "You are now right with God. God is at peace with you."

Paul says, since we are justified by faith. In others words we are forgiven and set free from our sins and our guilt. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ. Notice that Paul doesn't say that *we will have peace* with God. He says that *we have peace* with God right now.

So why don't we always feel God's peace in our lives? Why did so many of us raise our hands or nod our heads a few minutes ago? Why does it feel like we are constantly looking for peace? My guess is because stuff gets in the way. Stuff like our expectations, our pride, and our sufferings.

First our expectations get in the way of peace.

We expect life to go a certain way, and when it doesn't, we get frustrated, filled with pain and conflict of our own making. I've come to the point in my life when things don't go the way I expect, I hit the pause button and I pray something like, "God if this is the road you want me to take, I'm going to need your help." And it comes, in ways and through people I least expect.

Second our pride gets in the way of peace.

Oh... we so.... want to be right, don't we? We don't want to admit when we are wrong, or that we made a mistake. Just ask my wife – no don't ask my wife... It is not natural for us to apologize. Do we? So instead of peace, we experience resentment and more frustration and more pain. I have come to a point in my life where I realize the devil loves to use my pride against me. It's a battle I fight every day. We all need to learn how to let go of our pride.

Third our suffering gets in the way of peace.

God's peace seems so fleeting on a good day let alone on bad days. God's peace seems so far away when life throws challenges at us, like the loss of a loved one, a serious illness, or some other unexpected hardship.

And yet, consider what Paul says. "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Notice it all begins with God and God's love. God loves us. And nothing can separate us from God's love. Did you hear that? We get so caught up in the suffering part. And yet, because of God's love Paul says, "we can rejoice in our sufferings."

How can that be? Who wants to rejoice in their sufferings?

I don't believe Paul is saying that we should "like the pain" or "enjoy the suffering" that we encounter in life. But when it comes, we can choose to see the gifts that come with it.

God does not desire that we suffer but when sufferings come (and they will) God suffers with us. When we suffer we can either blame God or turn to God for help. Paul says turn to God for help and peace comes.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he didn't turn away from God he turned to God and endured the suffering for our sake. Through the cross Jesus leads the way for life in all circumstances.

Paul says. "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us." We are talking about spiritual growth here. The most important word in this passage is the word - *knowing*.

There are so many things in life we don't know. We don't know why cancer hits one person and not another. We don't know why one person is cured and another is not. We don't know why a loved one had to die so soon. We don't know why we lost our job and someone else didn't. In fact, there is so much about life that we don't know.

But we do know this: "All things work together for good." That's what Paul says in Romans 8:29.

I believe everything happens for a reason. There are no accidents in life. Everything happens in order to strengthen our faith. Those who live by faith live like this: When good things happen we turn to God with thanks and praise. When bad things happen we turn to God for strength and support. Either way we turn to God daily.

That's what Jesus did. That's what Paul did. That's what we are called to do. It is our baptismal calling. God's promise of life and love is poured out for us every day through the waters of baptism. It's always Valentine's Day for us so that we might live a life of discipline for Jesus every day.

As we live into our baptismal calling my prayer for you is this, may the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and our minds open to the ways of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.