

Sermon: 3rd Sunday in Lent

Text: Romans 5:1-8 (vv.1, 3, 4)

Theme: Peace in suffering

Goal: God is with us when we suffer and He strengthens us through the peace we have in Jesus.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Our text begins with *“Therefore”*, indicating that what follows is the result of what was said in the previous section. We preached about “Faith” last Sunday, based on Chapter 4 of the same letter to the Romans; and about “Not Guilty”, this means, “justified, declared righteous”, the Sunday before, based on this same Letter to the Romans. Paul *now proceeds to outline the many benefits of justification by faith*. The first one is “Peace with God”; the other benefit we will highlight among several is that “Suffering brings Hope” for the justified children of God. (ABC 1358).

I – Peace with God

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Peace Paul is talking about is not *mere peace of mind or peace of soul* (Series B, 92), as many people are searching for it in many religions and books of self-help, peace that vanishes when the first cloud appears. The Peace we enjoy as believers is that *we no longer live in a state of hostility with God*, but we were reconciled with Him by the atonement Jesus did for us. *This is a lasting peace that nothing will remove.* (ABC 1359). God is not the angry Judge anymore, but he is our loving Father. We have free access to Him by faith in Jesus, and we can talk to Him confidently, “Our Father who art in heaven”, as the children of the

Sunday School will present us today when they do their revision of the Lord's Prayer at the end of the Service.

The enjoyment of this peace is ground for rejoicing. We enjoy blessings related to our past as our sins are forgiven; and to our present as we can now stand in God's presence because those sins are forgiven; and our future as we anticipate a glorious life to come.

(ABC 1359). *Not that we can always be bouncy optimist with a genuine, perpetual smile, but we can always draw on a sure source of joy.* (Series B 92). And this brings us to the second blessing we enjoy as justified people before God, as Paul says:

II – Suffering brings hope

“Therefore...We also rejoice in our sufferings.” How can someone rejoice in suffering?

I am sure that all of us have passed or are going through moments of intense suffering. Sometimes it is a physical suffering: an injury, a sickness, a pain, a surgery. Sometimes it is an emotional suffering: a deception, a frustration with our beloved one, an offence, death of a close family member. Sometimes it is spiritual suffering: a specific sin that hurts us, doubts or problems in our relationship as church members... Each of us can make a list of our personal experiences on suffering.

The Apostle Paul made several lists of his sufferings. We read one list here on Ash Wednesday: 2 Corinthians 6:4-10. In the same letter, he wrote a more detailed list in Chapter 11: “I have been... in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent night and day in the

open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country; in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food. I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concerns of all the churches..." and so on. (2 Corinthians 11:23-

28) (See also: 1 Corinthians 4:9-13). Can you compare your list with the list of the Apostle Paul???

Anyway, it is this apostle Paul who wrote by own experience: "Therefore...We also rejoice in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God had poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

I know by experience that the problem of other people doesn't solve my problem. As a friend of mine said: *My wounded toe hurts more than your mourning*. But the Bible is giving more than just some human counselling; the Bible shares experiences of faith! How did a faithful man like Paul find comfort, peace and joy even amidst suffering? Looking to Christ, to His suffering and to His glorious victory! Therefore Paul can confess: "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." As Christians, we have to look further; we have to lift our eyes higher, through the glasses of God (as I preached last Sunday), to try to understand what is happening. And if we don't understand, even so, we rely on God's promises. *Believers must develop the ability to face difficulties without giving up their faith. In fact, says Paul, they should rejoice, because suffering has the positive*

outcome of building endurance, which leads to a tested character, and this character produces hope. (ABC 1359)

III – The suffering of the Prodigal Son

When I was preparing this sermon, I was thinking about the suffering of the Prodigal Son, far, in a distant land, without money, hungry, without friends. If his first plans had succeeded and he would have become a rich business man in that foreign land to where he had moved after receiving his part of his father's share, perhaps he would never ever come back to his father's house. The story would have had a totally different end. But through his suffering, God brought him to repentance and back to his father's home, where he was received with gladness and feast. Think about this in your suffering: Is God calling you closer to Him? Did He call you back to His lovely home through some suffering? Enjoy the peace He offers and rejoice even in suffering. God's plan is always better than our plans!

Conclusion: Suffering is no longer seen as a punishment from God, as many ask, "Why? Why I? What I did to suffer this and that?" but a bit of pedagogy. God is working through these things to help and heal too. Paul understands that God is not responding to our goodness, he is saving us despite our badness... The salvation of God comes to us in our weakness, while we are sinners... All this flows out of the peace that comes to us through the faithful relationship established in Christ. God's love has been poured into the emptiness of our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

My wish is that the Spirit of God would pour out into our hearts a full measure of Faith, Hope and Love that these words would define our lives and shape both our suffering and our success. (Phil Brandt PBrandt@cu-portland.edu).

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... Furthermore we rejoice in our suffering... (because) hope does not disappoint us.”

Amen.

(Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 23 March 2014)