

Sunday 14th June 2020 – (Romans 5:1-5)

Welcome:

Good morning and welcome to Church from your couch. Thank you for joining us this morning. We stand in God's grace, we boast in our hope through Christ. We claim the endurance given by the Holy Spirit. The love of the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts. Let us be open to this love as we come together in worship. Amen.

Reading – Romans Chapter 5: 1-5

Our reading this morning is taken from the New Testament, from Romans chapter 5 and we read verses 1 – 5.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we^[b] boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we^[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Amen and may God as his blessing to this reading of His Holy Word.

Sunday 14th June 2020 - Sermon (Romans 5:1-5)

For a few weeks now we have heard the word 'Furlough' in news bulletins. The furlough scheme, a temporary benefits package, introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer during this pandemic crisis as the government seeks ways to support employers and self-employed people to cover wages whilst businesses are closed. And although the scheme has been extended, this temporary benefit package can't be sustained and where at first it offered hope to others – we now see the first signs of the government seeking pay-back from employers through clawing back some of the contributions, even though some businesses cannot yet open.

Benefits packages – when people apply for new jobs, they also look closely at the benefits package offered by some employers.....I'd like to share with you an interview experience of a university graduate. *A young engineer on graduating from university got an interview for his first job. The person interviewing asked him what kind of salary he was looking for, he replied oh around £100k depending on the benefits package. The interviewer replied – ok, how does this benefits package appeal to you – 8 weeks paid annual leave, private medical and dental health care for you and your family, paid sick leave, a new car every two years. The young engineer couldn't believe what he was hearing and shouted out – REALLY! – "ARE YOU KIDDING? The interviewer said 'YES, but you started it first'!!*

Have you ever thought about the fantastic benefits package we get from God when we listen and are willing to receive and accept the good news? In our relationship with God, the benefits package is exceptional and it's permanent, everlasting. God's benefits package to us contains the following:

- *Forgiveness for the past*
- *Purpose and meaning for the present*
- *Peace of mind*
- *Access to grace*
- *Hope*
- *Love*
- *Certainty*

In our reading from Romans Ch5: v1 -5 demonstrates the benefits we have from being in relationship with God. And Paul wrote his letter to the Romans to give them a source of encouragement and the message to the original hearers of Paul's message must have electric.

It might help for us to be reminded of Paul's original hearers of these words in Romans. This is a group of Christians for whom hope is, no doubt in short supply, they too are living through a time full of challenges and uncertainty, but of a different sort. Professor Scott Hoezee describes it this way, "They live in the heart of Roman darkness, right under the nose of the Caesar himself. They live in an empire in which that same Caesar is known as Deus et Dominus, God and Lord.

This regime is increasingly hostile to this new Christian faith. It is not a hopeful situation, in many ways the circumstances they lived under could even be called frightening. This is not an audience to which you want to make sunny, cheerful promises that you cannot keep. "God's beloved in Rome" do not want to be given false hope.

They want Paul to offer them real, substantial, reliable hope. And Paul brings it – "he proclaims a hope that cannot die because it emerges from the death of God's own Son. It is a hope that transcends suffering, it is a hope that surpasses sorrow, trouble, and yes, even the coronavirus.

This hope is ours, too. Paul says, "we are justified by faith" and because of that we also have: Peace with God through Christ. We have free access to Grace. We have hope in sharing the glory of God. We are standing right in the middle of hope, and this hope, Paul says, does not disappoint.

Let's explore a few of Paul's assertions as benefits in God's package:-

We have peace – Paul says, "Therefore, since we have been justified, that is, legally declared righteous, we have peace with God. Justification referred to here as an act of God at some specific point in the past, means to 'declare' righteous, not to 'make' righteous. And it is this justification which ushers in a new era, a long hoped for era where the peace of God would transform our relationships with him. The idea of 'peace' comes from the Greek word for 'peace' which itself translates a well known Hebrew word, namely 'shalom'. Referring not so much to a purely inward peace, but a relationship characterised by God's peace toward the sinner, towards us.

It is God's disposition toward us and the freedom we now have in our relationship with him. There are no obstacles in our relationship with God. It is a peace that is founded on justification which we receive when we trust Christ. This ushers us into a place of grace with God. We stand confidently in God's grace towards us – a grace he made available through Jesus Christ. We cannot earn it by works of labour. It is given to us!

Further still, he has given us hope for the future. We talk about 'hoping for something', in the sense of wishing for something to which we aspire, but which we aren't really very sure. That was not the context in which Paul used the word. When he talked of rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God he was talking of something he knew, about which he was sure and which he had experienced. Paul was absolutely convinced that because of what Jesus had done for him, he would be able to experience the power of God's glory eternally. Do we have that same joyous conviction of the power of God's glory in our lives? God is the author of continual hope. Paul says, "And hope does not disappoint because God has poured out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom he has given us. God's love has literally gushed forth into our hearts: it has not been given sparingly, but freely and lavishly.

Have you ever considered that on your very worst day and in your very worst moment, you are still at peace with God through faith in Jesus? No circumstance can remove you from being at peace with the creator of the universe. Peace with God is at the centre of our faith, it is our foundation upon which we build our lives.

So why would Paul turn from the subject of peace to the subject of suffering? Don't those ideas seem contradictory in our lives? Paul teaches us in this section that peace and suffering are not opposing words in the life of someone who trusts in God. Note that Paul doesn't say that we have to celebrate our sufferings but glory "*in*" our sufferings. In other words, during our suffering, we can have perspective to see its value and rest in the fact that our peace with God is never shaken. It's not denying the fact that suffering is hard. Rather, it's having a quiet confidence that God is in its midst. God uses suffering in our lives to bring about perseverance, character and hope. He uses it to transform us into the person He's made us to be; to take us from Christian infancy to a more mature faith. And who is our model for suffering? Our model for resting in God's peace in the midst of suffering is Jesus Himself, who died for us. He suffered emotionally, physically and spiritually as He went to the cross for His enemies, as he went to the cross for us! These five verses offer so much hope and perspective. We have lasting access to God, we are never removed from being at peace with Him and nothing in this life can shake our security.

Our reading from Romans 5:1-5 is one of Paul's great lyrical passages in which he almost sings the intimate joy of confidence in God. Trusting faith has done what the labour to produce the works of the law could never do; it has given men and women peace with God. Before Jesus came, no one could ever be really close to God.

It is only when we realise that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that there comes into life that intimacy with him, that new relationship, which Paul calls justification. Through Jesus, says Paul, we have an introduction to this grace in which we stand.

When our hope is in God, it cannot be disappointed. When our hope is in the love of God, it can never be an illusion, for God loves us with an everlasting love backed by an everlasting power. The Christian hope never proves an illusion for it is founded on the love of God.

When we are willing to listen, receive and accept his word, we receive a benefits package that cannot be beaten, it is not temporary, it does not have 'catches' or paybacks, for God's benefit package doesn't disappoint. Because of our faith in Jesus, we can have peace, and boast in our sufferings, why? Because suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope.

A hope that is not empty because God's love itself has been given to us. So we can cling more to God and see with our own eyes that God will see us through any tough time and situation, not just the here and now but for all times and in all situations. His love will never give us up. Of this you can be certain. This love is proven. It is proven on the cross. This hope we have in Christ does not disappoint. In this we can boast, in this we can endure, in this we can have courage. There is a future to rejoice in of which we can be certain. And the Holy Spirit lives in us and he who gave himself up for us didn't do all that for nothing. **Amen.**

Prayer

Loving God our heavenly Father, your hope arises with each dawn, pushing back the rubble of our lives. Each new day reminds us of your grace, you paint hope across our skies. Into the deafening cry of hopelessness you whisper love. Love that catches us, holds us. There is no end, just new beginnings. No finish, just new starts and we thank you for being with us always.

We thank you that you hear our prayers on behalf of others. Lord we pray for those enslaved by the precariousness of their existence: those who are slaves to hunger, thirst and malnutrition; those whose lives are held captive by the threat of warfare and violence. We remember before you all who work to feed them today and give them hope for tomorrow; and to bring security of peace in our troubled world.

Lord, we pray for those enslaved by physical or mental suffering by the pain caused by illness or injury; for those whose lives are held captive by anxiety or grief. We remember before you all those concerned, to bring healing and comfort, to listen and to care, to convey hope.

Lord, we pray for the whole Church, a place where love, shared worship and fellowship lead to spiritual growth so that we might be able to take your Good News to our neighbours and the world, who are hungry for peace and hope and love.

Heavenly Father, we ask that you will give each one of us courage to follow your ways more closely. May we find peace in our struggling, joy in our fellowship, hope in our perseverance and the love that never lets go.

Lord, in your mercy, hear us in Jesus' name. AMEN.

