

REV. TODD HOEFFS

2nd Sunday after Pentecost (series A)

Gathering the Scattered YouTube COVID message

Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

“We Shall & Have Overcome”

June 14, 2020

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast 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. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

No pain, no gain.

We’ve all heard that from coaches and athletes a time or two.

Or “give til it hurts” which often means being sacrificially generous which significantly affects our bank accounts.

What about the humorous prayer, “give me patience Lord, but give it to me NOW”!?

We’ve all learned a little bit about patience & endurance.

My great aunt Helen used to sit & tell me: Todd. Life is filled with many disappointments. Get used to it. Builds your character.

True. It does, like it or not. It does. Produces an attitude to problem solve & handle it.

Which trusting faith in Christ helps.

COVID 19 has offered many lessons in patience and endurance.

I used to be the kind of shopper who’d duck in and out of grocery stores to pick up one of two things.

Can’t really do that now.

Lines are too long, need to sanitize, wear your mask, pay attention to the arrows on the floor for customer distancing.

You make a list, plan, get all you need at one time.

Patience.

Not a real hardship compared to people actually suffering through the COVID virus.

Or having to put off a "normal funeral" for a loved one which doesn't help the grieving process.

Suffering is something we usually try to avoid.

We protect our kids from harm and suffering as much as we can.

We can't always keep the bullies or trauma away from them for long.

Its best to prepare them.

Help them face trials. Offer our unconditional love & support to cope with it.

To overcome it.

To face it and celebrate the victory over it.

With the Lord's help.

Always. With the Lord.

Being justified by our God is a huge blessing, isn't it?

Its truly one of the important teachings of our faith.

It IS our faith.

Justified BY faith.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ Who is our peace.

When we're justified, God looks at us JUST AS IF WE NEVER DID ANYTHING WRONG!

He sees Jesus in us.

And our faith holds on tightly to this!

Trusts this.

For without this grace, we'd never pass this life and into the Heavenly Kingdom.

We'd be doomed to worry if we were ever good enough for God to Love us.

For while we lived as sinners, Jesus died for us.

For a sinner is anyone who misses the mark.

Who misses the target.

Who does all things right but even does one thing wrong or thinks wrongly is a sinner.

All of us are.

It's a level playing field.

No one sinner is worse than another.

So while we and our world cared less about anything but ourselves.

Christ died for us.

Our faith trusts this.

And we are made right with God because of it.

How peaceful that is!

We want peace.

We want assurances.

We don't want any kind of suffering.

Many the times all of us orchestrate our lives to avoid any kind of pain.

We look for the path of least resistance.

As a child, I never climbed trees, played sports, jumped off of heights – all to avoid getting hurt or breaking bones.

So it took me until my 40s before slipping on ice, falling on cement and separating my shoulder.

I was always careful.

Never involved myself in anything that could potentially bring injury.

But even my avoiding couldn't stop the fall.
We see injustice and violence and ask why?
We see hunger and drought and devastation and ask why?
We see fire, flood, unemployment, bankruptcy and ask why?
We see racism and discrimination, war and terrorism and ask why?
Why mental illness?
Why drug & alcohol addictions?
Why cancer?
Why disease?
Why COVID?
Why, why, why?

It always begs the question "why does God let this happen"?
Did God make it happen or allow it?
Is there a difference?

Yes. There IS a difference.

God doesn't look down from heaven taking divine pleasure in making our lives tough.
He's not a get even kind of God.

Or else he wouldn't have invested so much time into making a way for us to be with
Him forever

Actually made one with Him,
Justified by our faith in Jesus!

Now, God does allow these unpleasant things.

But

He doesn't create those things.

He has never made one single evil thing.

Ever.

Those bad things evolve from the ricochet effects of our sinful thoughts, actions &
words, whether we're always aware or oblivious.

See the difference?

God creates NO evil or harm.

God is love. God is mercy. God is help.

Even though evil & harm are everywhere.

And even though He allows it,

Even works in us with the bad things,

THE remedy is here.

The sin vaccine of Jesus' shed Blood

Created on the cross

Washed into our very lives through Baptism.

Poured into our mouths in Holy Communion.

Every prescription filled when our Lord cried out IT IS FINISHED!

While we were sinners.....Jesus died

That has fixed all harm, all tribulation all troubles.

That perfect sacrifice cancels evil's eternal power.

Evil is broken, ruined, empty.

The cross is the fix

The cure

The long lasting remedy

In this we glory in

BOASTING IN OUR SUFFERINGS

Paul uses a Greek word for this boasting which means holding your head up high.

Walking in confidence.

It's not a rejoice.

Like we're happy to be lousy

No, we boast about it

Brag about what we're enduring

Brag about HOW we are enduring.

With God's divine guiding.

And that enduring comes from a Greek term still used today

—thlipsis—

a compression fracture often mentioned in sports meds

This zeros in on us, intensive Pressure closing in on us --

Makes us feel like our world is caving in

For this we boast, brag, glory.

We tell others what has happened and why we are still OK –

because God is on our side! He will bring us through --

And this produces endurance,

endurance produces character,

and character produces hope.

This hope will not disappoint us,

because God's love has been poured out in our hearts

through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Boasting in the suffering helps us see a connection between the present grief & the suffering of the past already overcome in Christ.

Only with Christ in us & with us are we able to endure.

Endurance,

a never failing determine course of action in spite of difficulties and testing.

As we go through trials,

we develop greater perseverance to deal with increased pressures.

Character

(which my great aunt said must be built up) is fortitude.

Strength.

Ability to cope, adapt & roll with the punches.

Character is shaped and re-tooled into the image of Christ that's present in us being made clearer.

It slowly exposes the quality of what's being tested.

A solid faith, a determination to hang on in spite of it all.

In the heat of suffering, God gives grace for us to endure.

So when people complain about their hurts, their troubles, their suffering:

Don't stop them,

Help them see their boasting in this because God has spared them!

This creates hope.

A way forward.

A meaningful story of rescue.

This is the way of the baptized.

Those who live & die & rise up alive in Christ.

Such character-building unleashes Hope into our surroundings.

Living each day as a new day of grace and mercy.

Blessed and moved by the saving Gospel of Christ.

And as followers of our Lord, hard times, trials, sufferings,

reveal who we really are:

Christ who is always in us.

Christ Who never disappoints,

Even as life is filled with them

We shall and have already overcome in Jesus. Amen.