

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ 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.

May 22, 2016
Trinity Sunday

Peace With God

Romans 5:1-5

Today is Trinity Sunday, and, as the name implies, today is a day to focus on one of the most mysterious, amazing, confusing and wonderful aspects of our faith – the Holy Trinity – God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Creator, Savior, and Sustainer.

Unfortunately, it is also a Sunday when we preachers too often turn into “wannabe” seminary professors, and turn you into “don’t wannabe” seminary students, and turn this space intended for praise, adoration and revelation into a classroom. If we could get these pews out of here and bring in some wooden desks, we would. Then we turn the Bible into a textbook, and try to explain to you what our seminary professors explained to us when we were preacher “wannabes.” And it isn’t as if this works. Rarely does anyone walk out of church saying, “Ah! The mystery has been revealed! Now I understand!” Mostly we leave thinking, “Well, I’m glad that’s over. What’s for lunch?”

Let’s try doing things a little differently today. Let’s try a more Bible-like expression of the meaning of Trinity Sunday, because, the truth is, the Bible never gets academic about the Trinity. None of the writers of the New Testament ever tries to *explain* the Trinity. They seem to understand something we don’t. It isn’t a theory or abstract theological construct at all – it is a praise-filled exclamation of the hugeness of God; a God so bent on being in relationship with us that it takes a three-in-one God to sign, seal and deliver that relationship to us.

The apostle Paul says this exact thing in these five verses of Romans 5:

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 rejoice...because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit...

I’ll make a confession. When I first looked at these words on Monday, I was not in the right frame of mind, although I didn’t realize it at the time. I read this passage with the thought that this Sunday is Trinity Sunday – a theme the church made up – and now we have to find scripture passages that mention all three persons of the Trinity because nowhere in the Bible is the word “Trinity” ever mentioned. Rather than mining this passage for its own truth, we’re just commandeering it to give ourselves something to read on Trinity Sunday.

Like I said, that’s not the right attitude in which to read anything, much less the Holy Bible. So, when I read these verses, I kept looking for a way to pull the rabbit out of the hat; how to pull a sermon on the Trinity out of a passage that was meant for another purpose. The apostle Paul is writing this deep, amazing, complex letter to the Christians in Rome, and in chapter 5, he happens to put the three magic words in five short verses, so somehow it’s my job to pull a sermon on the Trinity out of this biblical hat.

And so, instead of letting the Spirit speak to me about this passage, I tried to manhandle the passage. This is the stuff they tell you not to do in seminary, by the way, manhandling scripture passages. I know better. But then, something happened. In spite of my wrong attitude, these words hit my brain in a new, fresh way, like the surprising taste of fresh strawberries– you’ve eaten them a million times before, but, when you get a really sweet one, it is like you’ve never tasted a strawberry quite like that before. Here are the words that hit me afresh:

We have peace with God.

The thought suddenly struck me: What would it be like if you knew right now that, for the rest of your life, you had one relationship that would never be damaged, no matter what you did? None of us has ever experienced that, so maybe you can’t even imagine it, but try for a second. Imagine knowing right now that no matter what kind of stupid thing you say or do in some thoughtless moment in the future, your marriage will never be damaged or scarred or broken. Envision being sure right now that your best friend will always be your best friend and nothing you ever do, no matter how thoughtless or insensitive or hurtful, will cause your best friend to no longer be your best friend. Picture being absolutely sure that no matter what you do, no matter what you say in the heat of conflict or worry or pressure, it is impossible to alienate your boss or your neighbors or your kids.

We all know that this isn’t the way things are. The road of our lives is strewn with damaged and broken relationships. Marriages grow distant, you walk on eggshells with your kids, friends come in and out of your life. Disappointment, distance, we’re constantly trying to negotiate the dangerous waters of relationships.

So, wouldn’t that be an incredible peace to have, if you only had one relationship where you didn’t

have to worry about what you say or don't say, do or don't do? You never have to try to pick and choose your words, or hold your tongue altogether, or worry that some impulsive act is going to hurt someone who is dearest to you. There will never be distance, things will never be awkward or uncomfortable. Nothing will ever cause a rift between you.

Now, imagine that one relationship in which that is true is the most important relationship in your life – the one between you and the Creator of the Universe. Imagine that there is nothing you can do – *nothing you can do* – to lose the love of the Lord of lords. You can wander away from God, but not completely so, because God will pursue you like a shepherd chasing a runaway sheep. You can disobey, break promises, do terrible awful things, but you can't make God go away.

As Paul says, *we have peace with God*, and that peace is accomplished through our Lord Jesus Christ. I can guarantee you right now that there is an unending peace established between you and God, and no matter what you do or think or say, nothing will affect that peace. *God is at peace with you*. And God wanted it to be that way so badly that God became human and died on a cross to make it so. And if you have ever even for a fleeting second grasped that deepest of all truths, it is only because the Holy Spirit of God has entered your soul and enabled you to grasp it. If you believe that this outrageous claim to have peace with God because God became human and died on a cross to reconcile us to himself...if you believe that, have faith in that, then you've just proven the existence of the Holy Spirit, because I can't think of another reason – outside of outright insanity – you or I would believe it even for a minute.

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

We are at peace with God and this will never change, because God's Son has made things right between us. Jesus made things right between you and God, and the Holy Spirit has given you the faith to believe it. So, even in the hardest times, the darkest valleys, the deepest suffering, hope will be there because God will be there.

Our Christian understanding of God three-in-one is not a theoretical or philosophical one. *We know what God is like because of what God has done.* We know that God is all-powerful because God created all things. We know that God is faithful because even when we humans don't keep our promises to God, God keeps his promises to us. And we know that God is three yet one because of what God has done, in his incomprehensible love for us, God became human to take upon himself the price for our sins, and defeat the power of death so that we need never fear death, and then his Holy Spirit continues to be with us and in us, enabling us to have faith, to understand God's plan for us and the world, and to display to the world the Good News of the Gospel.

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Experience the peace of knowing that God the Father is at peace with you, because God the Son has made everything right between us. And no matter where you go or what you do, God the Spirit will be with you.