

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
Romans 5:1-5  
February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016

Here's a secret for you. Many unbelievers in the Christian faith do not completely deny the existence of God. In know that might sound strange. Some do, for sure. What makes God "unbelievable" is not so much that He exists, but that He can do something about our dismal lives. In this way, God is not so much an old fable, but rather one who is unable to help with the need arises. Therefore, God is not for me... He was not incarnate and became man for me... He did not live to die for me... He is a stranger. He is utterly untouchable and unapproachable – almost like a Great King or Emperor or Dictator. You are unworthy to find an audience with such greatness. That is a common pattern of unbelief that I hear about more often than the total rejection that there could ever be "a god." God is just too untouchable – too far off – too incapable to help little ole you.

A workaholic businessman whose company was going through hard times, his family life was crumbling around him and his bank account nearly empty was so tensed and strained that he was in serious danger of a complete nervous and mental breakdown. He went to his doctor. His doctor told him that the only thing that could save him was to find the peace and fellowship that God can only give. "What!" the man said. "To think that up there, there is one who wants fellowship with me?" I would as soon think of cooling my thirsty and parched throat with the stars of the Milky Way or shaking hands directly with the planets!" God, to him, was completely unfindable.

At times we are on the verge of believing this very thing... especially when times are very bad or when God's silence is deafening. We might think that something we did in the past must have brought God's wrath upon us. Almost like He is mad at us and now when we knock on His door, He's just not going to answer. You are too much of a sinner. You have disobeyed and crossed the line and now God is so mad, you have to go it alone. That's the way it is when you are such a terrible person. That's the way it is when you treat God as if He doesn't matter... He will just smite you. He will send lightning bolts down from heaven to strike you. He will write a royal edict against you... you will now be sent to prison... alone... you will die... alone... without the King's protection.

However, a little lesson in the Greek language – the language the Bible was originally written – will help us to understand that we have a God that is present with us and that we are not left alone. I have two words I would like to teach you. They are important words and their meanings matter.

The first important word is *Prosaḡoge* (προσαγωγή). It means to approach. It also means to access. There are two great pictures in this word. 1) It is the regular word for introducing or ushering someone into the presence of royalty. It is also the regular word used for the worshipper when approaching God. Not by merit or worthiness are we ushered in before the King. No, rather, it is by God's grace... or as St. Paul says, we have access through Jesus by faith. 2) It's also the word for a harbor or a haven. If we take it in that meaning, it means that so long as we tried to depend on our own efforts we were tempest-tossed, like mariners striving with a sea which threatened to overwhelm them completely. But now we have heard and believed this Holy Word of Christ.

How much have we wanted to have access to the places we want to be? Access to a world series game or the super bowl. Access to a closed movie set so that we could get up close and personal with our favorite stars. Access to the King, who can pardon, who can hear our case, who can set you free. That's granted access for you through Jesus. There was a reason why the curtain in the temple tore in two on the day Jesus was crucified on the cross. That curtain was a divide between the people and God. God was in the Holy of Holies and everyone else was too unholy to enter in. But on Good Friday that curtain was rendered useless. Now, total access to safety, security, hope, life and forgiveness is granted through faith in Jesus Christ. St. Paul talks about it here in Romans. Jesus accomplished it in the cross at Calvary.

Our second Greek word for this morning is the word translated as "endurance" in the text read for today. It says, "...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character..." However, the translation, "endurance" really does not do justice to this word. The Greek word is *hupomone* (υπομονη). This word means more than endurance; it means the spirit which can overcome the world; it means the spirit which does not passively endure but which actively overcomes and conquers the trials and the tribulations of life. The great composer Beethoven, if you remember, became deaf. When deafness threatened him, the most terrible troubles for one who relies so heavily on his ear for the sake of his livelihood, it said that Beethoven said, "Instead of pity for myself, I will take life by the throat." That is *hupomone*. If someone were to say to a gallant soul who was undergoing great sorrow: "Sorrow fairly colors life, doesn't it?" Back would come the reply: "Yes! And I propose to choose the color!" That is *hupomone*. The word for endurance or "fortitude" is not the spirit which lies down and lets the floods of suffering pass over it; it is the spirit of which meets things face forward, chin up, and overcomes them. I know there is, or has been suffering in your life that produced the desire to curl up in a ball in the hopes that if you stay that way long enough, it will pass. But our Lord says, these sufferings that we endure, will produce. That's good news.

When you suffer, beloved in the Lord, take your seat right next to you Lord. The way it really works is that He takes His seat right next to you. He shows you suffering and pain. And we wonder, though, what comfort that is for us? His sufferings are accentuated during this time of year and we may not like that – we don't like to think of that. But this is done so you can take your seat next to Jesus. This is done because you have already taken that seat. He suffers with you in your struggles. He is next to you, with you always to the very end of the age. And while it is tough at the time – like it is here during Lent – we know that the Lord is with us all the way to the other side. Because on the other side, the suffering stops. The resurrection comes. And new life, restoration, hope poured out into our hearts, is the last word. It will always be the last word for you! That's why there is always something after suffering, as St. Paul writes to the Church at Rome.

God is not far off, untouchable or unapproachable. During this sacred penitential season of Lent, our Lord is active while showing us where He is. We have access to Him through a Savior who came to be with us – right next to us. Our God shows us how approachable He is by sending His only begotten Son to die for you and for me. Access and endurance. Those are the two things we need. That is what we have. Never forget it, beloved in the Lord. The Lord give you this. We need it – we have it. Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.