

“PEACE WITH GOD”

Rev. Becky Stephens

Text: Romans 5:1-5 NLT

God’s Word: Romans 8:18, 28, 31-32, 35. 37-39 NLT

Romans 5:1-5 NLT

Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ² Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.

³ We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

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Have you ever gone through a deep, dark time where you just could not find any peace? Have you ever found yourself thinking: "I am no good; God couldn't possibly love me; I have missed the mark; there is no hope for me"?

I would assume many of us have. Maybe you are feeling that way this morning. Or maybe you know someone else who is feeling that way.

When I was in college, I went through a period of time when I felt like that. I felt really bad about myself. One day, as I was feeling and thinking this way, I walked into a music store at the mall. In that store, I heard, coming from the overhead speakers, Billy Joel's song: "I love you just the way you are." And in that moment, it felt as if God were speaking to me through that song. It was as if God were saying: "Becky, don't be so down on yourself. I know you even better than you know yourself. I created you. And before you were even born, I died for you. Becky, I love you just the way you are. Now get on with the amazing life I have planned for you!!!"

That night, when I got home I was reading from Colossians.

And I came upon a passage that gave me a tremendous amount of relief, and also made me want to jump for joy!!! It's found in Colossians 2:13-17:

*"You were dead because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come And Christ himself is that reality."*

The reality is found in Christ!!! I think this is what Paul is telling us in Romans as well. The reality is found in Christ. And what is that reality? That reality is that God loves us. God loves us!!! God loves us!!!

*"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Or as our bulletin cover says for this morning: "I loved you at your darkest."

What is the worst thing you have ever done? What is the lowest you have ever gone? Don't say it out loud, just think about it. Search your mind. What causes you most shame? What sin have you committed that you are most worried about finding forgiveness for? Have you ever done or thought something that you wouldn't even share with your closest friend--for fear that that person would no longer love you or even want to be around you?

I bet most, if not all of us have. We all live with deep, dark secrets. We have all done things or thought things that haunt us. Many of us have said hurtful things to others that we can never make amends for. Some of us think about things that we would never tell anyone about. Some people are brought to the brink of suicide or insanity because of things they have thought or done. Self-hatred very often comes from guilt and shame.

Paul says, *"Don't let anyone judge you--the reality is found in Christ."* And whatever you have done. Whatever you have thought. Whatever you have said. God has forgiven you of those things, cancelling that which was against you and that stood opposed to you; He took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Do you believe this? Coming to accept and believe this is what the Good News of Jesus Christ is all about. Coming to accept and believe this causes us to discover a whole new life opening up before us. It's a new life marked by grace, and an increasing appreciation for what God's mercy offers us--what God has done for us in Christ Jesus!!!

The Founder of the Biggest Revival to hit this world in the past 300 years, John Wesley, was a man who was searching for "peace with God." One day it came to Him, when he was listening to someone, in a Bible study, read Martin Luther's Preface to Romans. Wesley wrote: "About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

John Wesley started preaching salvation by grace through faith alone!!! It was the Great Awakening, or the Methodist Movement. And it spread like wildfire across the continents. When we come to know and truly believe that God loves us, unconditionally, no matter what we have done or who we are...when we come to accept ourselves and thus, others because of God's acceptance and love for us...this is when new life begins--this is when we have been made right, as Paul says, *"through [God's] faithfulness combined with our faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

And peace with God is what all people need and crave. All of us search for peace—peace of mind.

I googled "peace of mind" just out of curiosity this week. Here are some of the things which came up:

- \* 40 ways to create peace of mind through tiny buddha.com
- \* 9 ways to find peace of mind in tough times
- \* The Peace of Mind Foundation
- \* Peace of Mind Early Education

\* The Ten Commandments for Peace of Mind

\* Peace of Mind Dog Rescue Home

...and it goes on and on and on.

We are all searching for peace of mind. It's part of the human condition.

Pastor Tim Keller used the following example to show how to find peace of mind in Christ:

"Do you remember when your mother used to say, 'Don't eat candy before meals?' Why did she say that? Because she knew it would ruin your next meal. The trouble with eating candy is that it gives you a sugar buzz, and then you don't feel hungry. Candy masks the fact that your body needs proteins and vitamins. The sugar buzz from candy masks your hunger for the real nutrients that you don't have.

Things like sex, power, money, and success—as well as favorable circumstances—act like spiritual sugar....they can give us a false sense of peace. People who are eating these candies are basing their day-to-day joy on supposedly favorable circumstances.

When the circumstances change, it drives us to God, because when the sugar disappears, when the candy gets taken away, we're forced to pursue the feast that our souls really crave. We'll hunger for the spiritual nutrients we really need."

Recently I read about a famous comedian whose quick wit and endless supply of jokes had guaranteed him huge audiences for his entire career. But when he died, a darker story was told about his life as well. He had had a falling out with his father when he was young, and they never "made up." Then, the tragic pattern repeated itself when one of his own sons fell out with him and got "cut off." I can't imagine what that must be like. Imagine knowing that there is someone there, only a telephone call away, who is one of your closest blood relatives...and yet he or she won't speak to you, or have a thing to do with you. And imagine that going on for years and years and years. There is something deeply disturbing about the whole picture--but a lot of people live like that.

There's an even bigger tragedy. A huge number of people live exactly like that in relation to God.

In Romans, Paul is talking about a reconciliation to end all reconciliations!!!

*"Since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have..."* what? ...a warm glow in our hearts? ...a sigh of relief that our sins have been forgiven?...a new understanding of what it means to belong to God's people? Yes. Yes to all those things and more!!!

Because at the center of it all we have PEACE WITH GOD!!! And *"the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."*

Pastor Mike read to you from 1 John Chapter 4. God's love has done everything we could ever need, and everything we will ever need!!!

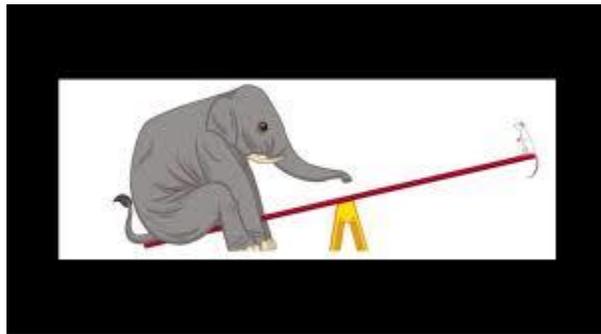
In verse 8 of Romans Chapter 5, Paul says this: *"God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."*

Let me give you a visual. You all have seen those old-fashioned scales, right?



(Show picture of scales on screen.)

And you know how they work. When you add weight to one side of the scales, that side will drop down; the more weight you add, the further it will drop. Then, if you begin adding weight to the other side of the scale it will drop down, but because the scale is a lever system, when one side drops, the other side goes up. So, let's just imagine all the bad things we face in this life as weights that push us down, like the weights on a scale. But what happens if there's a giant boulder sitting on the other side of that scale? Or a train car? Or an elephant? Like this.



(Show graphic of elephant on seesaw)

Those scales aren't moving, right? That's what God does in our lives. God throws all of his weight onto the scales so that no matter how much bad stuff we deal with in our lives, it doesn't bring us down. And if we know that, then we can have hope even when we are being bombarded by trials and difficulties.

If God loves you and God loves me—and everyone else so much that He came down from heaven and died for us, even when we were at our darkest...if God loves us that much...how much can we trust God to bring us peace of mind, and hope even as we suffer in this present life?!!!!

As Paul says later in Romans Chapter 8 that that we read responsively this morning as an affirmation of faith, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Absolutely nothing!

Are you searching for peace this morning? Do you feel as if you can never be good enough for God to love you? Are you trying to win God's approval on your own, but you are continuously falling short? Are you sad? Are you lonely? Do you feel dirty and unloved? Do you know that "God shows his love you for you in this: while you were at your darkest--Christ died for you?" Do you believe this for real? Do you have peace?