

Romans 5:1-8
Third Sunday in Lent
March 12, 2023

I've never lived in oil country but have read books that tell of people drilling deep and when they hit the right spot there's a gusher. Oil comes pouring out and they hurry to cap the well. At prices of our present times, you wouldn't want to lose much. Tying that picture with the water imagery in the other readings today we might think of a flood. Again I never really faced that problem. The spring on our farm would overflow in heavy rains, making work to clean out the debris it left tangled in fences or beyond its banks. Once when I was in the midst of a hospital call there was a major storm and power outage so we were required to wait in interior areas. When I was allowed to leave the street was flooded, causing concern for making it through with the car but not of getting swept away by current. Thoughts of a flooding stream struck me as I pondered this text. It shows us

THE BLESSINGS JUST KEEP ON COMING

- I. Abiding peace
- II. Joyful hope
- III. All through Christ

As we look at the overflowing blessings that keep on coming we start with abiding peace. Paul built on the preceding chapter, of which we heard a portion in the Second Lesson last week. Responding to the Lord's promises Abram "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." That description comes from the accounting world, saying God placed assets on his page in the ledger. Here Paul used the word "justified" in reference to our status. That comes from the court scene. The judge or jury pronounces the verdict of "not guilty." I haven't been part of that experience either, except once when I fought a speeding citation, but we see plenty of trials on TV shows and in reading books. Important matters are at stake when you go to court. The outcome may affect where you spend a good chunk of the rest of your life, mar your reputation or involve a significant monetary penalty. What a relief to hear the pronouncement, "Not guilty!" That's the verdict we hear in God's court, although it was not expected. As we stand before the all-knowing judge, reflecting on our life, our sins stare us in the face.

We know the standard. God says, "Be holy as I am holy." We come nowhere close. Sins are a constant part of our life. As we confessed earlier in the service, we are "by nature sinful," having inherited sin from our parents. When individuals get in trouble it is common to blame parents and upbringing, and there are abusive

and neglectful ones who shoulder responsibility, but sometimes it is just an excuse without substance. But it is also true that original sin is passed on to us from our parents. Remember Adam, as we heard about two weeks ago. Sin entered the world through him and passed on to all of us. We look at our life and also admit we "have done what is evil and failed to do what is good." Day in and day out, hour after hour we are disobeying God's commandments and blowing opportunities to help others with kindly words or deeds. So we expect a thundering guilty pronouncement.

Instead it's "not guilty." After the initial shock, "Did I hear that right?" there is relief. Overwhelming, flooding peace washes over us. We do not have to pay the penalty of endless and painful suffering in hell, no fine, no prison time, no public embarrassment. Peace, precious, abiding peace is ours!

The Apostle identified a resulting blessing of access to God. If you are scared of him you will not ask for a favor. You wouldn't even come close. You would try to hide from him like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. But when you are justified you are happy to come before him. That's the access we have. We come before the Lord in prayer for personal needs and for the needs of others. We approach him in worship and praise. We are thankful for the verdict. We express our gratitude. The charges cannot again be raised.

This peace is a blessing I pray you know. It turns your whole life around. Many people drag a load of guilt, a heavy burden that ruins their day and relationships. It is often not recognized as the cause. Or they may try to remove it in other ways. They will try to make up for the wrongs committed, but when is it ever enough? They may try blaming others but deep down are not sure that's really the case. It's only masking their guilt. They may ignore or deny that the law of God applies to lives today or in the extreme, even try to deny that God exists. Such methods grant only temporary relief at best. The peace that God brings does last. It solves the nagging, stifling problem of guilt that we all share. It is abiding peace.

II.

That peace opens the floodgates as the following progression of the text tells us of our joyful hope. The verses start and end with hope. It is our hope of glory, of heaven and sharing God's glory there. Heaven is everyone's hope. Well not all—a few feel they are so bad there's no way they will get there. Is life in heaven only a hope? Some insist that it is, that we won't find out until judgment day whether we made it. That's because they are looking to themselves in some way to qualify. Here's where the greatness of our Christian hope comes in. It is not a wish like we hope for a raise or a promotion at work or hope that our favorite team wins the

title. We certainty of heaven; it is guaranteed because the work has been done. That's why the text can say that we rejoice in hope. The word is the same as boast. We can brag because our confident hope rests not in ourselves but in Jesus as we will hear more later.

We hold that attitude even in times of trouble, for Paul uses the same word in verse 3. "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance." That's not normal. Who is happy for trouble? Only a masochist, and that's a mental condition to be treated. We may willingly suffer for a cause we believe in. The Bible does say that persecution for the name of Jesus is a privilege. But this reference is not limited to those situations; it addresses any suffering we face. Disappointments come such as when we don't get that raise or promotion. The diagnosis is not good or the cause of the health problem we're dealing with is not found and it lingers, spoiling our days. Why would we rejoice in such times? We know that God is using it for our good. He humbles us so we see the need for his help. Troubling circumstances intensify our prayer life and drive us to the Word for answers. They exercise our faith, building it stronger. One benefit we heard mentioned was perseverance. That is a patient endurance. More severe trials bring a greater need for faithfulness. Perseverance bears the load without complaining. If it is God's will for us to suffer he will enable us to bear it (that's a promise he makes, by the way). We realize it is God's power at work. Paul wrote elsewhere , "When I am weak, then I am strong." God's power stands out when we realize we can't handle life on our own.

Perseverance results in character. The term is used of a soldier who faced battle successfully or of a coin tested and found to be genuine. Faith is refined and strengthened by reliance on God. We become more acquainted with the source of our help.

That brings us back to hope on Paul's list. We look to the future and the glory prepared for us. That is why our certainty is so valuable. It enables the endurance and produces the character. Our hope "does not disappoint us." It delivers. The Spirit fills us with God's love that is poured out on us. The blessings just keep on coming.

I'm not saying we are unfeeling. Pain hurts the Christian and tears come. We bleed like everyone else. Nor is the text promoting the Stoic philosophy of the ancient Greeks. It is often characterized as "Grin and bear it." It taught that a person should deny their feelings and stick it out. If the problem seemed too great, suicide was a way out. No, God teaches us to turn our troubles over to him, trust

that he will work them out and provide what we need to deal with them since he loves us. He gives us joyful hope in times of trouble.

III.

That leads us to the final verses of the text which point out that these overflowing blessings all come through Christ and his sacrifice for us. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." We were powerless—that's an understatement. We were absolutely lost. Our record held only sins, nothing good. We were ungodly, Paul noted. God knew it, even before he created the world, so he planned and sent his Son. Jesus did nothing amiss and he was under no obligation to help us out, but he bore our shame and suffering all the way to the cross. He died in our place.

"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die." It is rare indeed. People may sacrifice themselves for their family when under attack and soldiers for their country. Those acts are for people or principles they hold dear. Jesus came for those who were disobedient and opposed to him, who ruined his perfect creation, denied his existence and credited other gods for all they had. He did it out of love. His was a very special kind of love, undeserved, unconditional, unlimited love. It was that Amazing Grace we sang about earlier. There is no greater love. It is yours by faith. Believe the unbelievable. He did it for you.

His unequalled love has an impact. We are amazed and thankful. Children sometimes have to be reminded when grandparents give them something, "Now what do you say?" May we respond with heartfelt gratitude for God's precious gift without being told! Sing his praises. Come here gladly and regularly to offer worship.

Do not limit your thanks to within these walls. Speak of his goodness as you interact with others in your daily activities. Live each moment of each day in service to God and those people he has placed around you. Follow his ways. These actions are also blessings, something to be enjoyed. Experience God's abiding peace and joy as you are filled with living hope. The blessings will just keep on coming throughout life into eternity.