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“It Doesn’t Disappoint” Sermon on Romans 5:1-5

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There is the honorable life. There is the shameful life. Those were the life choices in the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. Honorable. Shameful. What side would you want to be on?

The Church was shamed. Shamed by some for wandering outside of the Torah, consorting with Gentiles over barbecue. Shamed by others for being different. Not participating in the conversations about Roman politics, sports, money, and sex. The Church was shamed for being different. Different can be different, or different can be holy. Jesus was killed for being either different or holy.

Lay on top of that the view that says the holy do not suffer. Think of the righteous Job suffering, and then think of his friends saying, “The reason for your suffering, dear Job, is that you reap what you sow.”

Paul lets us know otherwise.

Romans 5: 1-5

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

A few years ago, I was swimming laps in a pool at a resort. I didn’t grow up going to resorts, but I can tell you that resort living goes quite well with my personality.

I have an aversion to suffering. I like people handing me things that I need like fresh towels and suntan lotion, and things I didn't know I needed like a frozen pina colada.

Well, as I said, I was doing some laps at the pool. I got out of the water and found my place next to my family, but to the right of me was a stranger. A rather older gentleman with white hair, a very pleasant face, and a Southern accent. As I situated myself on the deck chair, he said, "I was watching you swim. You must have been a swimmer in college." Not typically one to engage strangers in conversation, I laughed and said, "No."

The stranger said, "Well, the smoothness of your stroke, and the effortless way you moved from one end of the pool to the other, you appeared to not be starved for breath. I assumed you were a trained athlete." I said, "Go on!" And he did! He asked me what I did for a living. "I'm a preacher." "That's fantastic," he said, "I can tell you must be very good at what you do. You seem to have a wonderful voice and a kindness of heart." "I'm sorry," I said, "Could you repeat that? I couldn't hear you over my family rolling their eyeballs." He did!

When my family had heard enough and indicated that it was time to leave, I told the man it was a pleasure to meet him and then I hopped up and sashayed away. I've never sashayed in my life.

What I usually do is grunt and groan getting up from low places.

But, on that day, I sashayed. I was lifted up by that man from Ellijay, Georgia who could see the truth in me and wasn't afraid to testify to it so openly and eloquently.

Now, you may be asking, what does this have to do with God? Nothing. I just like the story. But I do think it has something to do with Paul.

Did you listen to how Paul said, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God..." It isn't, "we WILL have peace with God." It is, "We HAVE PEACE with God." Paul meets us beside the waters of our baptism and says, "My goodness, you seem to have made it your calling to follow Christ. I can just tell by the way you live and move and have your being that you have peace with God. Why, your very being just exudes the Glory of God."

"Go on!"

"Ok. I will," says Paul. "The endurance that you show with all that blows against you, you take in full stride. I can tell you are a person of utmost character. I can certainly tell that life has its challenges, but you radiate with hope, and you are not ashamed to let it shine. You have Spirit that makes you bubble over with the love of God. It is who you are!"

Now does hearing that make you roll your collective eyeballs or does hearing that make you want to sashay out the door with a good Word coursing through your blood and bones? It is who you are.

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...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.

The church in Rome was experiencing shame. They were suffering. I used to find that hard to relate to. But I do believe that the Christian faith is having to navigate – for the first time in America – some degree of shame. And, maybe, rightfully so. The news carries almost every week a story of Christians misbehaving, sinning, creating darkness and pain. And as a result, we all suffer from these imposters posing as the Body of Christ.

We can suffer from false advertising. I think though we can suffer from the truth of who Jesus is.

Being the Body of Christ causes us to suffer, for we are people of the Word. We are people who believe that in Christ, there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. That doesn't go over well in a world where what matters most, it seems, is our identity. The hard conversation these days is what does it mean that there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female? What does it mean that everyone, everyone is welcome?

I do believe that the Church can suffer standing up for those who get steamrolled and abused over and over again. Bringing people to the table who have had no voice and saying, "Be quiet for just a moment. Let them speak."

I do believe the church can suffer because we are not populists. We do not take our orders from the whims of the day, but we do have a shepherd. I sense the wheels are coming off this country. If I were to make a guess as to why, I would say that we have lost our compass. And when you lose a compass, you begin to wander in circles, and everyone does what is right in his or her own eyes. Now the easiest thing to do is to go along with it. The most challenging thing to do is to be different. To be Holy.

I've been on a little crusade to find a compass because we need it. I've been on a little crusade for people to memorize some sort of scripture, just to have in their minds, a direction. I do believe that the Word is a light unto our feet and we're losing that so rapidly. So, my crusade now is for the 23rd Psalm.

Jodie Folk, I don't know if you know Jodie, he caught on to my plea. That's Jodie. He's quick to say, "Can I do anything for you? Do you need anything?" Well, he caught on to my plea to memorize the 23rd Psalm and took that plea to our men's Bible Study group. "Come on, fellas," he'd say at the end of Bible Study, "Let's see if we can do the 23rd Psalm by memory." And what would follow is a cross between the 23rd Psalm and the Griswold family Christmas. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, for which he stands, liberty and justice for all." But over time, we got better and better.

Today, Jodie lives in a memory unit. He's losing his memory, fast.

On Friday, we all asked his son Chad about his dad. And he shared how the move has made him very frustrated and angry at times. He said, "I made a trip to the lake house and finally found where my dad left his Bible. There was a note tucked away in it; it had been given to him by his mother, for his study."

Chad brought it home, picked up his daughter Sofia, and made the trip to the care center. If you've ever had someone you love in a care center, you know what it's like to drive up, park the car, and pause for a moment to muster up the courage and the prayer to face whatever disappointment you're going to find next. When you lose your memory, you lose your compass. When your dad loses his memory, you lose your compass. You wander around in a world that doesn't make any sense anymore.

Chad and Sofia found Jodie, and they sat next to him. Opened up to the 23rd Psalm and began to read. And the great thing about a shepherd is that it finds you.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside
the still waters;
He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will
fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

And Jodie wept. And Chad wept. And Sofia wept. And Jodie said, "I think I need a little more of that." Chad said, "When we left my dad, he was clutching his Bible to his heart."

We are people of hope. Hope does not shame us. Hope does disappoint us. We suffer in the glory of it.

For the world has lost its bearings; it is angry and frustrated at times. We know this is why we are here. It is our mission, and we are not afraid. For we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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.