

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
February 24, 2008

From Enemies to Peace

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon comes from the Epistle which was read earlier.

The words of our Collect for today tell us what the season of Lent is all about: repentance. "...Be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word..." When we go astray from God's ways, we are His enemies. For most of us, that description seems a bit strong. Who has not felt that they have been searching for or grasping for something, someone, who will connect them to the rest of the world? Who has not felt at some time that they are a stranger or an alien to God? When things go utterly bad in our lives, we look to the things of this world to make our lives better, to put some sense of order to our troubled lives. We look to friends and family. We look to the local self-help section of Hastings. Who we often don't look to is God.

Paul tells us in our text for today that it is precisely at these moments, when we have felt far away, that God has acted on our behalf. God did not wait until we were ready, until we changed, until we made the first move. While the silence of our doubt still rang loud, while our words were nearly erased by our stuttering, while we were reduced to apathy by our confusion, God made things right by the death of Jesus. We were separated, at a distance from God because of our sin, but He brought us back to Him through Christ's life, death and resurrection, on our behalf.

Though we may die for the sake of a loved one or maybe even a combat in arms, rarely does one die for a complete stranger or even an enemy. With God, however, it is different. The cross is the word that there are no strangers, just sons and daughters. There are no enemies, only friends. All of this was done for us for the reason that Paul says: *“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Through His suffering, self-giving love, He offers Himself to us, and we are changed from strangers and enemies to God’s beloved children.

Because we are justified we now have peace in the presence of God. No sinner can stand in the presence of God and live. But by faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross, our sins, which would bring our certain death before God, have been removed. We are reminded by Paul that it is something that was done to us by God. That is the only way that it could ever be, God doing the act of salvation for us. Now, washed clean of our sins and wearing Jesus’ robe of righteousness, we have direct and permanent access to God and His grace. This right is given to all who trust in the justifying work of Christ. Of great comfort, assurance, and hope is the truth that God tells us we now currently and permanently stand in His grace.

Because we have been declared innocent and have been set free from our sins, we can boast in the hope of enjoying God’s glory in heaven. People have always been told that it is not good to be boastful. However, Paul is telling us the exact opposite! We joyfully boast. This is not glorying in our own accomplishments. This is a joyful boasting in what God has done and what He promises to all who trust in Jesus. We boast in the blessings which have been given to us by God, namely, as Paul says, our sufferings.

The question that we ask ourselves is why we would want to “*rejoice in our sufferings?*” We suffer many things in our lives. We suffer from the loss of a job. We suffer the death of a loved one. We suffer day in and day out. So why is it a good thing to rejoice in our sufferings? Paul says we boast about sufferings because suffering produces perseverance, the ability to cope and endure, no matter how difficult the situation. Take for example the Israelites during their time in Egypt. They were made to be slaves and servants. They were the chosen people of God and yet they suffered. However, their suffering led to perseverance because they knew that God would take care of all of their needs.

We too boast about our sufferings, knowing that God has made us His children through what Christ has done for us. As we learn to persevere and our faith passes test after test of troubles, that perseverance produces true Christian character or Christ-likeness in us. Then we too, when we are insulted, will not retaliate and when we suffer will make no threats. Then we will thank God for our sufferings which test and prove - thus strengthening our faith - and we will commit ourselves to our faithful Creator. Finally, suffering and persevering and character building will come full circle and produce even greater hope in us concerning our eternal future with God. This hope, Paul promises, will not leave us disappointed. God continually pours out His love for us into our hearts through the Gospel. As the Holy Spirit works through that Gospel in Word and Sacrament, He confirms in our hearts the truth of God’s message and the trustworthiness of the hope that message creates.

How does God’s love produce persevering, character-building, confident hope in us? He sets Law and Gospel side by side, correctly distinguishing between them. We

were powerless, ungodly, unrighteous, corrupt sinners. And *yet* Christ died for us, that is, in our place. There was nothing in us or about us that would move Him to do such a thing. Not only were we incapable of doing what God requires for salvation, we were actually ungodly and impious. We were God's enemies, whose sinful minds were hostile toward God, not wanting or desiring anything God wanted for us or from us. *Yet*, for those who hated God and actually fought against Him, Christ stepped in and let their punishment be put on Him.

We are God's enemies. We don't want anything to do with God because of our sin. Though we want nothing to do with God, God wants everything to do with us. That is why He sent Jesus Christ to this sinful creation. Creation was not meant to be sinful. Sin and death were not part of the order of creation; however, sin and death are now very much a part of creation. To remove the eternal affects of sin and death, Christ was sent to buy creation back, to buy **YOU** back. Jesus was our substitute, taking our place and suffering the punishment of death we deserve for our ungodly sinfulness.

Christ dying for sinners is the fullest demonstration of God's love we could ever have. God gave up His only Son to pay the price of our sins. There could never be a greater demonstration of love. As we look at the cross during Lent and are reminded that our sins brought Christ to that place, we should also be reminded of the width and length, the height and depth of God's love for us, demonstrated on that cross in the death of His Son. *“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* This is the gift which all Christians have, given by the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We have gone from being enemies of God to being reconciled

to Him through the death of His Son. Through faith, we have peace with God. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith, amen.