**Holy Trinity Sunday – Year C – May 26th, 2013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Romans 5:1-5 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Rejoice in sufferings? Yes! Jesus promises Perseverance, Character and Hope.**

*1 Therefore, since we have been justified* *through faith,* *we* *have peace* *with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,* *2 through whom we have gained access* *by faith into this grace in which we now stand.* *And we* *rejoice in the hope* *of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we* *also rejoice in our sufferings,* *because we know that suffering produces perseverance;* *4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope* *does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love* *into our hearts by the Holy Spirit,* *whom he has given us.*

Rejoice in sufferings? It’s really not a weekend for rejoicing… today we grieve with the residents of Moore, Oklahoma, who are burying their dead - 24 lives, including 10 children, snuffed out by a tornado, that also destroyed over 13,000 homes and caused $2billion worth of devastation. Those statistics do not include the untold spiritual damage done to the residents of that community. Rejoice in sufferings? It’s really not a weekend for rejoicing… today we remember with sobriety those who died in our nation’s service, and grieve with the families whose sons and daughters, husbands and wives, moms and dads are still paying the ultimate sacrifice to serve our country.

Rejoice in sufferings? Are you going to tell those people that? I have a hard enough time convincing myself to do that. Does God expect me, as a Christian, to be happy all of the time? To have a smile on my face, a spring in my step? Today it is my prayer, that after we study this section of Scripture from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans, that we will gladly say, “Yes, I will rejoice in sufferings, because of what my God has done for me! He promises perseverance, character and hope in sufferings.”

Today is the first Sunday in the season of Pentecost in the Church year calendar. We traditionally celebrate the Holy Trinity on this day – that our God is Triune, three persons in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we contemplate the divine mystery that is the Trinity, we cannot even begin to try to understand it, explain it, or rationalize it. It is a truth that we can only believe by faith. God never meant for us to understand him, but what he does want is that we understand and believe what he has done for us.

Our lesson is from Romans chapter 5, and Paul says, “**Therefore, since we have been justified**…” By using the word “Therefore” Paul tells us to read what he had just written so that we understand the point he is about to make. When we look at the previous four verses in chapter 4, Paul makes the argument that God has already justified us - that is, he has declared you and the world not guilty of your sins. He writes, “**Jesus was delivered over to death because of our sins, and was raised to life because of our justification.”** It was necessary for God to hand Jesus over to death because the punishment for our sins and the sins of the world is death. God transferred our guilt and the guilt of the world on to Jesus and put him to death, and so he died because of our sins. And then, Paul writes, **“…he was raised to life because of our justification.”** And because God the Father accepted Jesus’ guilt payment of death on our behalf, he raised his Son as proof of payment, and declared the world “not guilty” of sin.

But how does this declaration of innocence become mine? How do I receive the benefit of what God the Father did 2000 years ago? Do I have to choose to believe it? Do I have to work for it? Do I have to pay God the Son back for his sacrifice of death? If that were true, I would never know I had done enough or made a sincere enough choice or put enough effort into it.

Paul says, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith**…” although God the Father declared the world not guilty, he blesses me and you with that declaration of innocence through faith. This is where the third person of the Trinity comes into our lives. God the Holy Spirit gifted us faith through holy baptism. Through water and the Word he created faith in our hearts. Faith now believes and trusts and holds on to God’s promise that you are “not guilty”. You stand before God the Father innocent of all guilt and sin because of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

**“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** If a judge’s gavel pronounced you innocent of guilt and free from death, peace would naturally follow. This peace is not the peaceful easy feeling that “The Eagles” sing about on the classic rock radio station. Peace is our status with God the Father. Before we were given the gift of faith, we were enemies of God, by nature we hated him and were disobedient rebels. But since Christ took our rebellion and hatred and God the Father directed all of his anger toward Jesus, God the Son has made peace between us and God the Father.

**“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”** What is more you always have access to God’s grace. You always stand in his grace. Even when you do not feel at peace with friends or family, God still loves you. Even when you do not feel at peace with yourself, God still loves you. Even when it seems that the world does not love you, God always loves you, and by faith, you will always have access to that love. His love for you never changes, it never runs out, he loves you no matter what.

**“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”** That’s something to rejoice in - the sure certainty that God will bring me to heaven and to live in glory, in perfection and happiness for eternity.

But then with the next breath Paul writes, “**But we also rejoice in our sufferings**.” What!? I was just rejoicing in heaven and that I’m at peace with God and that he loves me. Now we have to talk about sufferings? Although heaven is ours, God does not float us through life into heaven on a Sealy Tempur-Pedic memory foam bed, with fluffy pillows and a glass of champagne in hand. Instead, on our journey to heaven, we suffer through life, don’t we? How many of you have never suffered from allergies, or never had the flu, or never personally known someone who died? How many have never suffered the consequences from the poor choices you made in life? How many have never been struggled with God in prayer - why his will had to be so different from yours?

We suffer through life, and Paul even wrote**, “We must go through many hardships before we enter the kingdom of God.”** (Acts 14.22) We must? I was still trying to wrap my mind and heart around the fact that I must rejoice in sufferings. Now he says it is necessary that I must go through sufferings? Why do I have to? Why does my God who loves me so much make me endure sufferings? Why doesn’t he take all my suffering and pain away? Why rejoice in sufferings? What purpose does that serve me?

Lest we doubt God and his love, Paul immediately shares with us why we suffer and why we will rejoice in sufferings, **“We rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance.”** Paul says, **“We know that suffering produces perseverance**,” because he suffered. In 2Corinthians 11 he goes through the list of sufferings, “Imprisoned, beaten, flogged, stoned, three times shipwrecked, been without clothes, food, friends, in danger from Roman government and his own people, the Jews, faced the probability that he might be put to death wherever he traveled,” but he knew that suffering produced perseverance, because he experienced that.

Perseverance means that we learn to hold on. Memorial Day weekend gives us a picture to illustrate this idea. This weekend is traditionally when city pools open up for the community. Have you ever observed a little child with their parent in the pool? Oftentimes a child may be afraid of the water and clings very tightly to mom or dad. When the parent, in an attempt to familiarize the child with water, gently dunks the child under water, the child doesn’t like it, and clings even tighter to their parent. God dunks us under the water through suffering, and yes, at times it feels that we are drowning in our suffering. But God always uses suffering to build up in us perseverance, the ability to hold on to God’s promises, to cling tighter to him. God uses sufferings to teach us not to rely on ourselves, for like a child in a swimming pool, we cannot tread water by ourselves, but we must trust in God, cling to him, and suffering teaches us to do that.

**“We rejoice in sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character.”** Character is this: one who has been tested and has passed the test. Memorial Day weekend gives us another thought to illustrate this point: who would you want next to you as your battle buddy as you head into combat in the mountains of Afghanistan? A green private who has never seen combat, or a seasoned E5, who has experienced multiple combat deployments? The veteran has what Paul calls character. In battle, the Army sergeant has become a survivor. He inspires and gives strength to his squad, because he has passed through hardship. Suffering builds you up in spiritual character – you survived suffering because you relied on God’s promises and his love, and it makes you stronger to face the next test. It makes you stronger to help others in their suffering, because you went through the same fire and by God’s grace came out victorious.

**“We rejoice in sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character and character produces hope.”** Hope is the sure confidence that patiently waits for God the Father to keep his promises to us. God has said, **“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.”** (Hebrews 13:5) This is the sure hope we have, “**The LORD says, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, the flames will not set you ablaze.”** (Isaiah 43:1-2) This hope we have is the confidence of which Paul wrote before his death, **“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.”** (2Timothy 4.18)

**“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”** God will never embarrass you by failing to keep one of his promises. He reminds you of that truth by the Holy Spirit who pours God’s love into our hearts - every time you read and hear his Words in the Bible, every time you receive the Lord’s Supper, God reminds us, he will not disappoint us – he will take us to glory one day. We rejoice in that glory that waits for us, to remove us from all suffering.

Even though the road to glory may be narrow and rough, that path may be covered with our sweat and blood, with our tears, even though we may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will rejoice in sufferings, because God has justified us by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. He promises that suffering is not without purpose. He promises that our suffering will be for our benefit. He promises that with suffering Jesus will bless us with perseverance, and character and hope, and so, my friends, yes, we will rejoice in sufferings. Lord, grant us the strength to do so. Amen.