

“The Wisdom to Endure It”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

May 22, 2016

Scripture:

Romans 5:1-5 (ICB)

Right with God

5 We have been made right with God because of our faith. So let us have^[a] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** ^[b] Christ has brought us into that blessing of God’s grace that we now enjoy. And we are happy because of the hope we have of sharing God’s glory. **3** And we also have joy with our troubles because we know that these troubles produce patience. **4** And patience produces character, and character produces hope. **5** And this hope will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts. God gave us his love through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us.

The Sermon:

So, I am heading out on sabbatical after this day is done. And in that time, besides taking a few road trips, and gardening, and lots and lots of naps, and some walks and some bike rides; I want to do some reading.

I want to know more about patience, and strength of character, and endurance and joy in the face of many troubles.

I want to study how hope does not disappoint us because we have the message of the love of God in our hearts. And we love God in return, and that gives us hope and joy from the Holy Spirit.

Footnotes:

- a. **5:1 we have** Some Greek copies read “let us have.”
- b. **5:2 Through our faith** Some Greek copies do not include this phrase.

Thing is, most writers don't talk like Paul about such things. Today, our writers are sociologists and anthropologists, biologists and social work scientists and researchers.

I have a growing stack of books in my home office; one is about secondary trauma, and recovery and strength. It's called *Trauma Stewardship*.

Another is about human resilience and courage in the face of falling. It's called *Rising Strong*.

Another is about the new and seemingly strange conformations that will take place in the Christian churches as we face the death of what we think we know church looks like and acts like. That book is called *Weird Church*.

Another, that I have yet to pick up, is called *Tribe: on Homecoming and Belonging*. I just heard about it on NPR and it is about the healing power of belonging.

I admit I also want to purchase a book called *A Planet of Viruses*. My geeky side wants to read that, just because!

(And I do still have one of my favorite mystery writers, Jacqueline Winspear, on that stack of books. There is a new Sheriff Longmire book in the stacks at Auntie's...I may well grab that one too!)

My point is this, what Paul was encouraging in the church in Rome, is still valid today.

We, too, need the message of hope and reconciliation that we are loved by God, beyond any shadow of a doubt. And this is shown us by the love of Jesus, who was willing to die for us, rather than destroy us. That sort of love and community is healing and transforming.

But while that love and joy are profound and life changing and of great comfort, it does not mean we are without suffering, without pain or conflict or heartbreaking losses.

Yes, we too need endurance. We need patience. We need a set of rounding core of beliefs to create an enduring character. We need hope.

Paul assures the church of Rome, made up of Jews like himself, and non-Jews, also...that they are all loved by God. That the promise to renew the world and set things right...this promise is fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus; the one who died and was raised from the dead, to show us that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God.

Paul never taught the miracles of Jesus, or even the parable stories Jesus told.

He taught over and over again that the great hope of the Jewish religion; YHWH fulfilling the promise to Abraham to be a sign to all peoples, and the restoration of right relationship between God and humanity...Paul taught that this promise and right relationship were seen in Jesus and known through trusting him.

Though we are broken and damaged, though we are frightened and foolish, though we are hurt and oppressed...Paul reiterates again and again...we do not lose hope. We can count on the love of God in suffering and in pain, we can count on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even in the dark night of our souls.

Of course, that gift of the Holy Spirit in that dark moment may not be joy, but endurance.

And the learning of patience in our endurance.

And the strengthening of our innermost courage into a commitment of our entire life and character.

And from there, a sturdy hope that is not crushed.

In the earliest Christian communities, there were occasions of oppression and martyrdom. Sometimes, individuals, even whole communities would give up their newfound Christian faith in the face of the threat of torture and death. "Offer incense to Caesar, or else"! So, they did.

Some church leaders were of the belief that they had no right to ever return to the Christian community, and should remain outcast and scorned.

But other bishops won the day, and invited them back into the community of Jesus, returned them to the table and the bread and the cup, and the witness and the love and the self-giving sacrifice and power of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

While I am on sabbatical, I hope to experience, as well as read about, the exploration of sturdy hope, of resilient souls, of dreaming people of possibility.

And I trust you to continue to be such people!

People of love of God and gladness in receiving God's love. No matter how miserable you are...you are loved.

And that, if you must endure (and we all must endure) pain and suffering, you find the wisdom and the strength to endure it.

I hope we all discern that it can be borne, when we are in support of community and surrounded in the warmth of acceptance, forgiveness and love that will not let us go.

There is hope. And there is love. And we will not be disappointed in trusting God with our lives, no matter how weighed down we are, or how terrifying the future may seem.

- Jesus shows us the way to walk, and we will walk where he has gone before.
- Through hardship, and in friendship.
- Through family trials, to the family of faith.
- From violence, to the experience of peace.
- Through suffering, to an end of suffering.
- Through death, to life.
- From fear of God, to the experience of the love of God that will never let us go.

And so we will continue as people of hope. And I will continue to hope and love, with you, and for you, while I am gone.

God bless you all.

Amen.