

“Obedience of Faith”

Romans 5:1-5

Trinity Sunday Year C, June 3, 2007

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Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and 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.

Prayer.

Peace.

Peace with God
is what the Apostle Paul
is speaking about
in his letter to
the faith community in Rome.

Consider the dis-ease
... the fundamental lack of peace ...
people have with God and religion.
George Buttrick,
a well known Presbyterian preacher
of the last century
was on an airplane.
Writing intently on a yellow note pad,
the man seated next to him
was impressed with his diligent effort.
“Excuse me,”
he is reported to have said,
“You seem to be working on something
very important. May I ask
what it is?”
“Certainly,” Buttrick replied,
“I’m a clergyman
and I’m working on my sermon.”
“Oh, religion,” the man observed.
“I don’t like to get all caught up
in the ins and outs of religion.
Do unto others
as you would have them do unto you.
The Golden Rule: that’s my religion.”
“And what,” asked Buttrick,
“do you do, sir?”
“I work at the university,” he replied.
“I’m an astronomer.”

“Oh,” said Buttrick,
“astronomy. I don’t like to get
caught up
in the ins and outs of astronomy.
Twinkle, twinkle little star:
that’s my astronomy.”¹

Consider the dis-ease
... the fundamental lack of peace ...
people have with God and religion.
It is easy to laugh
at atheists
and agnostics;
to tighten our face
with a smug smile
or to feel
those heart pangs of pity
for those who have never experienced
the same joy of faith
as we have.
Never talk about
politics and religion,
we were advised
by parents intent upon
teaching us how to be socially acceptable.
It would be inhospitable to
offend a guest.
Perhaps this well-meaning advice
demonstrates more of a concern
for social acceptance
than it speaks to the reality
that we are uncomfortable
speaking about religion in general,
or faith, in specific,
in social settings.

1 Pulpit Resources, June 3, 2007, p.48.

It is easy to point the finger at others,
 but, for a moment
 consider the self.
 Focus in on the uncomfortable,
 the places in life
 where there is a lack of peace.
 Take a look inside,
 into that shadow area
 of the super-ego,
 the partly conscious
 internal moral judge
 of your life.²

How different are we
 from the frantic father
 found in Mark chapter nine,
 who seeks first the disciples
 then secondly, Jesus himself,
 to heal his convulsing son?
 Jesus says to him,
 "If you are able!
 —All things can be done
 for the one who believes."
 Immediately
 the father of the child cried out,
 "I believe; help my unbelief!"³
 It is as if
 at the very moment of belief
 he is also swept up in his lack of belief.

We know what the father is speaking about,
 because we find ourselves in the same boat.
 Each of us delicately balance
 belief and unbelief
 deep in the recesses of our minds.
 We are never more than
 a few mis-steps,
 a few moments away
 from utter catastrophe,
 on the one hand,
 and complete justification,
 on the other.
 If our unbelief spins out of control
 leaving us in the dark night of the soul,
 there is no peace,
 only anger
 at a seemingly
 unfeeling, distant, or non-existent God.
 Likewise,
 if our belief becomes so pervasive

so ingrained in our soul
 such that we become in-distinguishable
 from the Master we serve,
 then we obtain complete perfection of our faith.

We spend a lifetime
 attempting to build the faith,
 walking the journey with Christ,
 in the hope that faith will become such
 that the scales will be tipped
 and our unbelief will be
 completely and utterly extinguished.

Do not despair if your unbelief
 continues to persist!
 In my feeble mind,
 disbelief is assurance that one is
 completely human,
 completely normal.
 Take a look around;
 you are in good company,
 (including your pastor)!
 Personally,
 I am much more concerned
 by those in denial
 by those in denial
 at the complete opposite end of the spectrum;
 when one becomes so completely
 self-righteous,
 so full of their own smugness,
 so convinced that they know the one true way
 and any other way is a pathway to hell.
 These are the Christians that trouble me.
 It is my observation that
 brothers and sisters who are
 fighting the homosexuality battle
 are not at peace
 ... with themselves, with others, or with their
 God.
 We can argue until we are blue in the face
 about abortion,
 conservative family values,
 a return to Biblical Orthodoxy,
 or any number of the phrases
 coined by the well-intentioned right,
 but where does it get us at the end of the day?
 Are we at peace?
 Are we feeling like we've accomplished
 anything?

Peace with God
 through our Lord Jesus Christ,
 as Paul writes,
 comes to us
 as a result of justification,

² Thanks to [Wikipedia.org/wiki/ego](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ego)

³ Mark 9:23-24 (NRSV)

something God has already done;
an action that has already been completed
on our behalf.

It does not come through
winning an argument
or through
some future event;
it was completed for us
by the cross of Calvary
and through the empty garden tomb.
According to scripture
no one can become so lost,
no one can go so far astray,
no one's religion can become so poisoned,
that the smallest element of faith
can become the conduit
through which peace with God
can be restored.

That conduit
through our Lord Jesus Christ
is the same means by which
the Holy Spirit
acts and works
by spilling love into our hearts
and into the world.
I can imagine no
more perfect complement
to peace with God
than love served up
by an active and engaged
Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.
"They will know we are Christians
by our love, by our love,"⁴
the folk hymn refrain reminds us,
because through
our love,
all will see the peace we've
been building with our God.
All will experience the peace
that is given to us
based even upon the most tenuous
strands of faith.

One does not have to be at peace with God
to partake of the Holy Mystery
known as the Eucharist,
or Holy Communion.
In deed, Jesus gives us the bread and cup
in an effort to bring us
the peace we so desperately long for.

I understand the reluctance
one feels
as a result of not feeling one is worthy.
Believe me when I ask,
who am I
to believe
that I am any more confident or worthy
to celebrate the mass,
to consecrate the bread and wine
for this holy meal?
By design,
we bring to the table
our broken nature
our defeated selves,
you and me alike,
We bring our dis-ease to the table
our loud and noisy lives,
seeking the good and perfect
gifts of love and peace.

Peace with God
is something we are all searching for,
agnostic and Christian alike.
Peace with God
is available for those who would claim
the gift
from a loving Heavenly Father,
from an obedient Son, Jesus Christ,
and from a persistent Holy Spirit,
intent on flooding the world with love.

So, come,
I invite you.
Come to the table.
Bring your burdens
your brokenness,
your pain and your despair.
Come to the table
and leave them all piled before God.
Through your faith
you will find peace
with a God
who loves you
now
and always.
Amen.

⁴ Carolyn Arends, "They'll Know We Are Christians."