

"The Process of Christian Hope"

Text: Romans 5:1-11

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: Is there anyone here that doesn't like steak? How about hamburgers? Or maybe an even more obvious question: Who likes bacon?

Assuming you do, you would nevertheless have to agree that there must be a *process* for you to actually possess and enjoy what you like. Someone has to actually breed and raise cows and pigs, and then those animals have to be killed, butchered, processed, and transported. Every step of the process can be messy and unpleasant, but everyone understands that the unpleasant aspects of the process are necessary if we are to get what we want. The reality is that most would rather not even know about, let alone *think about*, anything connected with the process. They just want to be able to put that unavoidable process out of their minds and enjoy the final product. Wishful thinking doesn't change the reality that it just doesn't work that way. There is an unavoidable process to get what you want.

So also our text for this morning tells us of an unavoidable *process* in the spiritual realm. There is an "end product" that all of us want, but our text tells us that that end product is gained only through a process. That desirable end product on which we focus this morning is *hope*. While the world understands "hope" as the anticipation of something that may or may not ever happen, Christian hope is the eager expectation of what we know *will* happen. We define it as "*a confident expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises.*" Obviously that's something we all want.

Our text for this morning begins by defining the unavoidable (and often *unpleasant*) process through which we gain what we all desire. More than that, God's Word here teaches us other priceless truths based on this unavoidable process. The text that will guide and instruct us is found recorded in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the Fifth Chapter:

^{ESV} Romans 5:1-11 *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character*

produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶ ¶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

So far the very words of God. In a world filled with so much talk that is worthless and annoying – so many things that are vain and pointless – we pray that these words might command our full attention, for they are the words of God Himself. That God the Holy Spirit would bless each of us through the study of these sacred words this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

The world around us is undergoing many dramatic and profoundly disturbing changes. Some are obvious, others not so much. One of the less obvious changes is the growing attitude that what we want must always be attainable without struggle or unpleasantness. If, for example, you want an education, not only should you not have to expend any real effort to learn, someone else should pay for it. If you want a nice house, car, boat, and furniture, you should be able to possess all of those things without sacrifice and with a minimum of effort – doing only what you like to do. In fact if others have what you do not (because you have not earned it through your own hard work and self-denial) then others, who *do* work earn and sacrifice, should be required to provide you with what you want. Think free cell phones, housing and food. Human beings have always wanted things. What's new is the notion that acquiring the things they want should not involve any sort of a process that is in any way unpleasant. Again, life doesn't work that way. Someone always has to work and someone always has to pay.

Our text for this morning began by identifying several end products that Christians immediately recognize as not only desirable but priceless: ***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through***

him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. The end products the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul here identified are 1) Justification by faith, 2) peace with God, 3) access to God and his grace, and 4) hope.

That's quite a list, and obviously all true Christians want all of these things. Yet here's where the problem (or challenge) for Christians begins. The first three things in Paul's list are gifts given to us after they have been earned through a difficult process by someone else, while the fourth involves a process that routinely involves difficulties that happen to us. You see the problem. In the normal course of life on a sinful earth, Christians understand God's will that we **"eat the labor of our hands,"** along with his general rule that if anyone refuses to work, then neither should he eat. God, in other words, wants us to be among those pulling the wagon, not those looking for a free ride.

Yet that general rule is reversed when it comes to the gospel itself. It's all turned around when we learn how it is that we are saved. There we do not earn, we can only receive. There we do not seek to provide for ourselves, we are to acknowledge that all that we need has been provided for us by Jesus Christ. The first three things in Paul's list in our text refer to the gospel, and therefore to those things that God himself provided and which we could in no way ever earn or deserve: 1) Justification by faith, 2) peace with God, 3) access to God and his grace.

The first item in the list (*justification*) is God's unilateral declaration that our sins have been forgiven. That forgiveness was not produced by us, but by another – Jesus Christ. Our text explained with obvious clarity not only how this forgiveness was earned, but how we played no role in that process – other than as recipients of a gift that was earned by another: ***For while we were still weak*** (or, a better translation, ***powerless or helpless***), ***at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*** ⁷ ***For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die--*** ⁸ ***but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** In other words, since justification was earned for us by Jesus Christ when we were powerless to provide forgiveness for ourselves, justification is a gift that we have received by or through faith. There was a process to earn that gift, but Jesus was the one who provided all.

The second item in Paul's list (*peace with God*) is actually a natural by-product of justification, and therefore also a gift given to us after it had been earned by another. We could have no peace with God if God still regarded us as sinful. God, who is perfect and righteous in every

respect, can abide nothing that is not. We could therefore know no true peace without God's declaration that Jesus has erased every one of our sins through his sinless life and innocent death on the cross.

The third item in Paul's list (*access to God and his grace*) is also a natural byproduct of our justification by God, and therefore also a gift we have already been given without earning it ourselves. The incredible visual representation of this new access to God that we now enjoy was the tearing of the temple curtain on Good Friday, at the moment of Jesus' death. Prior to that history-changing event, mankind enjoyed no direct access to God. Only the High Priest could pass through that curtain and enter the Most Holy Place of the temple, and the High Priest could enter there only on one special day each year. The temple curtain represented the sin that had separated us from our God. Since Jesus' death took away that sin, our access to God was restored. This gift too was unearned, freely given to us after it was earned by Jesus alone.

Thus the first three blessings listed by Paul in our text (justification, peace, and access) run absolutely counter to the normal way in which Christians understand God's plan for life on this earth, where God tells us to work to earn what we want. This is one of the great mysteries of the gospel. The greatest, most desirable thing in life (salvation) cannot be earned. It can only be received as a gift, *after* that gift has been earned by someone else – by Jesus Christ. Yet, no doubt because the gospel (God's plan for our salvation) is so contrary to what we would have expected, God took great pains to spell out exactly how his salvation plan is different. We find one of those careful explanations in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: ***"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,*** ⁵ ***even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved-*** ⁶ ***and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*** ⁷ ***so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*** ⁸ ***For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*** ⁹ ***not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*** (Ephesians 2:4-9)

So then the normal course of life is that if we want something good, we are supposed to earn it ourselves. Yet when it comes to that greatest of all good things – eternal life in heaven – God himself earned that for us and gave it to us without cost or obligation to us.

There was a most unpleasant process necessary to produce those good things; it's just that the unpleasant aspects of that process fell to Jesus.

But then we come to the great challenge of our text – the fourth item in Paul's list: hope. The problem or challenge that we need to recognize here is that while the Holy Spirit in our text identifies justification, peace, and divine access as gifts given to us *without any process that involves us*, hope is identified as a process that *does* involve us. In fact here's where the growing "gain without pain" mindset of our present society works against us. It's here that things can get confusing if we are not paying attention.

Our text identifies a process in connection with how God supplies us with hope, and that process not only involves us, it includes steps that we will regard as painful and unpleasant. Listen again to the words of our text where this process of the creation of hope is defined: ***"We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."*** What we are here told, working backwards, is that character produces hope. But character is produced by endurance, and endurance is produced by suffering.

So we return to where we began. Just as we love our steak and bacon, but would rather not be bothered with the natural process by which they are produced, so also we would love to be able to possess the hope that is here described, but without the necessary process by which it is produced – especially when we recognize that hope begins with suffering.

Influenced as we are by the world's growing "effortless profit" delusion, Christians can also fall into the seductive idea that since the gospel cost us nothing, so also *every* good gift from our God should cost us nothing. From our text we learn that this is just not the case. God's faithful children of every generation wonder aloud why Christians must suffer. Here we find God's answer: *If you want hope, which you do since that hope is the confident expectation that God will keep all of his promises to you, then you must accept that that hope is provided through a process that begins with suffering.*

While we could wish things were different, the reality is that they are not. Use this knowledge to your advantage. Use it to rethink the inevitable suffering of this life. Regard hardship no longer with resentment as the punishment of a careless God. Recognize suffering instead as the beginning of the process through which God gives you one of his great

blessings – Christian hope – learning also to say with Paul in our text: ***"Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*** Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16** When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ¹⁵ ¶ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

^{ESV} **Mark 8:27-38** And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. ³¹ ¶ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." ³⁴ ¶ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

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The Second Sunday in Lent – February 25, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 7 (Red Hymnal)

"As We Begin Another Week"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16) Our first reading tells of an early conversation between God and Abram, who is here given the name Abraham. It is important to note that God's promises here to Abraham were given before God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. This tells of the confusion that Abraham must have felt, as God's command conflicted so clearly with his promise. Abraham's course of action was simply to trust and obey. God keeps his promises.

The New Testament Lesson (Mark 8:27-38) In our second reading we hear Jesus ask his men what others were saying about him: "**Who do people say that I am?**" Peter was praised for his answer, but note that shortly thereafter Jesus called this same Apostle "Satan." The clear message is that "who we say Jesus is" is more than a one-time confession. Our confession is actually a moment-by-moment testimony, spoken not just by our words but by our actions.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 721 (Brown Hymnal)

"Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 5:1-11 (Printed on the back page)

"The Process of Christian Hope"

The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 389 (Red Hymnal)

"Not What These Hands have Done"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 48 (Red Hymnal)

"How Blest Are They Who Hear God's Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (38) Ave (40) Wednesday (25)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Caleb Schaller has returned the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI. St. John's School of Okabena, MN has called Teacher Paul Tiefel. Messiah of Eau Claire has called Becky Buck to serve as a full-time teacher for grades 3-4, Valerie Hammett to serve as half-time teacher in the lower grades, and Jane Murch to serve as music teacher.

Offering Box – The question has been raised whether or not the switch to an offering box has adversely affected our offerings. Please speak to a Council member or to the Pastor if you have input on this topic.

No Adult Bible Study Next Sunday – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town next weekend, so there is no Adult Bible Class scheduled. Sunday School and worship service will be conducted as scheduled.

CLC Events – Please speak to the Pastor this morning if your children are planning to participate in any of the upcoming CLC events, including the Grade School BB Tournament, ILC Visitors' Day, or the CLC Youth Camp.