

"The Process"

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: If you are at all "health conscious" it is highly probable that you have heard (and maybe find yourself now agreeing) that "processed foods are bad for you." Obviously that's an overstatement, since According to the Department of Agriculture, processed foods include any raw agricultural commodities that have been washed, cleaned, milled, cut, chopped, heated, pasteurized, blanched, cooked, canned, frozen, dried, dehydrated, mixed or packaged. In other words, anything at all that is done to food makes it "processed." Even what you grow in your garden is considered "processed" if you wash or cut it. To put it another way, *nothing* you buy in a store is "unprocessed."

It's also interesting that, although we know that everything is processed, we really don't want to know or see that process. We don't really want to see how a cow or pig or chicken is born, raised, and slaughtered. 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 our steak, bacon, and nuggets. There is an unavoidable process.

So also our text for this morning tells not only of a spiritual "end product" that all of us want but an unavoidable *process* to get it. 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 defines the unavoidable (and often *unpleasant*) process through which we gain what we all desire. The text that will guide and instruct us is found 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.

This is God's Word. In a world filled with so much talk that is worthless and annoying, we pray that these words might command our full attention, recognizing that 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 those 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 planet, 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, and, 3) access to God and his grace.

The first item in the list (*justification*) is God's unilateral declaration that our sins have been paid for in full. That forgiveness was not produced by us, but by another, by 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 grace through faith. There was a process to earn that gift, but Jesus was the one who did all that was necessary to earn it.

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 Jesus. 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 unholy. We could therefore know no true peace

without God's declaration that Jesus has provided payment for 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, 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, 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 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 are 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.

That means that 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 and will 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."*** We can trust the process because we can trust our God. Amen.

ESV **(Job 1:13-22)** Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁶ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁷ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁸ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." ²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

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."

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.



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The Second Sunday in Lent – February 25, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 358 (Red Hymnal)

"Lamb of God, We Fall before Thee"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: (Job 1:13-22) Our first reading tells of the beginning of the suffering God allowed to afflict Job. Terrible as it was, additional trials would follow. Yet in all of this we are told that Job never turned from his God. His example has helped countless others who have also suffered. The appropriate response is never to turn from the God, whose love is constant. As we hear from Jesus himself in our second reading, *"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"*

Psalm 84 (Supplement page 38)

The Second 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 -

Nicene Creed – (Supplement page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 144 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

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

"The Process"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 388 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Just as I Am, without One Plea"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

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 Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 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, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (21) Average (42) Wednesday (25)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour:
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Teacher Matthew Thurow has accepted the call to the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran High School and College. Pastor Michael Gurath is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Teacher Matthew Kranz is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Both Messiah of Hales Corners and Faith of Markesan have called Teacher Levi Schaller.

Church Council Notes – All Council members participated in the meeting on February 19th. Zachari Meyer, together with his daughter Freya, were released from membership at his request. The transfer request of Gary and Suzannah Miller to Redeemer of Cheyenne was granted at their request. Offerings for January were \$1,754 less than expenses. No action was yet taken on again offering the common cup in our communion services. The Council resolved to replace the failing refrigerator in the parsonage. The next Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 11th at 6pm.

Parsonage Refrigerator – As noted in the Council minutes, the 19-year-old refrigerator in the parsonage is failing and needs to be replaced. Although necessary, this is an unbudgeted expense.