

ROMANS 5:1-5 JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

Last week we celebrated Pentecost – a Sunday of great rejoicing in our liturgical calendar. It's the Sunday where our readings & liturgy celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the church. The Sunday after Pentecost is when we put the Holy Spirit into the context of the Godhead, and we celebrate the Trinity. So today our readings & liturgy reflect the Christian belief in the triune God – that is, the Father, Son & Holy Spirit; three persons, one God.

The reading from Proverbs this morning talked about Wisdom – wisdom, being a personification of the Holy Spirit, who was at work in the world at its very foundation. The reading tells us that the Holy Spirit is not just an afterthought – he was with the Father and the Son at the very beginning of creation.

Then in the Gospel reading from John 16, all three members of the Trinity are mentioned. We hear Jesus talk about the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life; that the Spirit will guide the believer into truth, and will glorify Jesus, by taking what is his, and declaring it to his followers. He says that what is the Father's is also his.

The Message translation helps us gain a better understanding of the Spirit's working. It says that the Holy Spirit takes from Jesus and 'delivers' it to us.

What is the 'it' that is being declared or delivered to us by the Holy Spirit?

The answer to that is found in our Romans reading. In a word, what Jesus 'declares' or 'delivers' to us is our **'justification'** before God.

Now don't switch off because I've thrown in some theological jargon! It's not difficult to understand. In fact, it's exciting stuff, and brings with it some amazing blessings! Let me explain...

In Chapter 5:1 Paul says that **'we are justified by faith.'** It's really important for us to understand what that little phrase "justified by faith" means, because encapsulated in those three words are all the blessings that God wants to pour out upon us! If we don't grasp it our lives as Christian will be impoverished – and not just in terms of heaven, but in the here and now.

So - What is justification? The essential meaning is God's declaration that the believing sinner is righteous (or perfect or holy) in Christ. This righteousness is **given** or **credited** to our account. We don't earn it - it's given as a gift.

When we moved from Woonona near Wollongong into this diocese, we left our oldest son Joel behind, renting a little flat that was part of our house. He was attending TAFE and on a student allowance, and there was a time when he spent his money on other things and didn't pay his rent. Before he got back on track he'd clocked up quite a debt. Now, we could either call in the debt, which he wouldn't be able to pay, and be within our rights to evict him; or...we could be loving and gracious parents, and 'credit' his account with the money he owed us. In other words, we could effectively pay his rent ourselves, thus canceling his debt – not because he deserved it, but because we loved him - which is what we did.

The debt we owe God is righteousness. He commands it. And he can command it because he's God. Righteousness is purity, perfection, living without sin. But no-one can escape that debt, because no-one can live a perfect, sinless life. So without Christ, we are all in debt; we are all condemned.

But – when we repent (in other words recognise our sin & turn back to God), and then believe Jesus died & rose again for us, you know, God gets excited! And when a person responds in repentance and faith, we're told it's not only God that gets excited. All the angels of heaven get excited!

God looks at our debt – knows we can't pay it – so allows Jesus to pay it with *his* righteousness. When we look at what Jesus has done for us and believe - we are credited with his righteousness. Which means...you guessed it....we are **justified by faith!**

As we continue through this short passage, we see that there is much that we receive through our justification. It might be hard to take it all in, in a short space of time, but let's see how we go.

A. First of all - *we have peace*

Verse 1 says "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

There was a time when we were enemies with God (v. 10) – whether we realised it or not; but now, through believing in Christ we have peace with God. Peace with God means that our problem with sin has been settled by the blood of Christ. God is our Father, not our Judge. That means we need not be afraid of him. It means we need not cower before him when we do the wrong thing. He's not going to zap us from heaven with a bolt of lightning. God has provided the avenue to peace with himself – we have simply to embrace it.

B. A second thing we receive through justification, is *access to God*

v. 2 says that through Jesus *“we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand”*.

Before we were made whole in Christ, sin stood between us and God like a huge wall. He was unapproachable. But once our sin has been dealt with through our union with Christ, we can come freely into his presence.

In our previous parish, we were guardians to a friend’s son while he was boarding at the Grammar school. One of his good mates was the principal’s son. He was always having sleepovers at his place. Where most of the students wouldn’t be comfortable approaching the principal about everyday issues, because of this lad’s friendship with the principal’s son, he knew the principal on a different level. He had a relationship with him and could talk to him on much more intimate terms.

Through Jesus, we can have an intimate friendship with God. God longs for us to develop this friendship. If we feel God is remote, most often it’s because we don’t accept the intimacy he offers. It’s because we don’t spend time with him, or approach him with the everyday things that concern us. God has thrown open the door and invites us into his royal presence.

C. The third thing that comes to us through justification is *hope - hope for eternity, and hope for now*

v 2 also says, *“we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God”*.

Because of Christ, Christians eagerly anticipate the time when they will share Christ’s glory in eternity.

I conducted the funeral yesterday of a lady who was only 60. It was one of those tragic funerals where Christian hope was not really embraced. A Christian funeral is so very different, isn’t it? I think of the times we’ve farewelled members of our own church family here. Though we grieve, our grief is tempered by the confidence that we will see them again.

I love the ringing hope of John 11:25 that begins our funeral service, where Jesus says, *“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;”*

Through our justification, we also have hope for now:

Verses 3 & 4 tell us, *“And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”*

Though as Christians we have heaven to look forward to, we still live in a broken world. By way of encouragement, Paul says we should **rejoice in our sufferings**, because in so doing, it builds our character and produces hope.

Now that's not a 'maybe' hope, as in, "I hope so and so wins the election." It's hope in the sense of expectation, as in "I hope to see my grandchildren on the long weekend (knowing they've booked into the motel across the street already.) Our *hope* is in the fact that God will ultimately bring all things into subjection to his will and to a glorious conclusion. That means that the trials of this world, though difficult, are not forever, and so we have cause to rejoice.

D. The final result of justification we find in this passage is that *We experience the love of God* (vv. 5ff)

God revealed His love at the cross when Christ died for those who were rotten to the core, and powerless to change. Paul's argument is this: if God did all that for us while we were His enemies, how much more will He do for us now that we are His children!

The Spirit within brings God's love to us and through us. We're told, *he pours his love into our hearts*. It doesn't seep, or dribble, it *pours!* Once we belong to Christ, his Spirit flows into us and out of us. Jesus told us that from the life of a believer, *rivers of living water* would flow from within him.

So often, the thing that draws others into the Christian faith, is that they look at a believer, and sense something different in them, something supernatural, and they find themselves yearning for it. It is the Spirit of God within the believer, his love within them that draws others to Christ.

What a wonderful thing it is, what a blessing, what an amazing gift, to be **justified** in God's sight.

Are we experiencing these blessings? If not, perhaps we need to take another look at the promises we're given in this passage, and exercise our faith. If we have been truly **justified by faith** in Jesus Christ, then all these blessing there are waiting for us to receive them.

let's pray...