

5<sup>th</sup> Mid-Week Lenten Worship- We Preach Christ Crucified

March 29, 2017

Romans 5:1-11

Peace with God through Our Lord Jesus Christ

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Dear friends in Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace,

The starting point for our Lenten meditation this evening is the Garden of Eden. There our first parents doubted God's love and questioned God's Word. Their sin led them to eat from the tree God expressly had forbidden to them. Forsaking the image of God, they fired the first shot in man's long war against God.

No longer was there perfect peace with God, or with creation, or with each other. Now there was shame and guilt before God. Now there was sweat in hard labor. The blessings of marriage and children were subject to strife and pain. They lost immortality and incorruption. Adam and Eve and we their children die mortal and corrupt because of our sinful human nature.

The Creator God neither destroyed them because of what they had done nor overlooked it. He drove Adam and Eve out of the garden so they would not eat of the tree of life. Had they eaten now, it would have kept misery and the war with God going on forever. In its place, God in a sense planted a new tree. That new tree would restore peace and immortality. That tree is Jesus' cross on which he was crucified as our Redeemer.

We preach Christ crucified. Jesus' death on the cross established peace with God. God gives us that peace through the gift of faith. This is our justification.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

People want peace. There is that old stereotype of every beauty pageant contestant answering the question about what she wants the most, "World peace." There have been only scattered periods in our history as a country that we have not been engaged in a war somewhere.

The apostle writes about the kind of peace we later will pray, "that the world cannot give." Paul's peace is God's peace. It is the spiritual peace that is God's reconciliation of the entire world to himself in Christ. It is a peace we already have in Christ, the Prince of Peace. Jesus brought that peace on Christmas night. The angels proclaimed it, "And on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." [Luke 2:14] Dare we say that the holy angels, who are not omniscient, did foresee the new baby's cross in the distance?

Christ crucified is the one and only "through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." Picture the high priest of the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement gaining access to the most holy place in the

Temple. Only by the blood of Christ pictured in the lamb's blood in his hands could he stand before the presence of God behind the curtain. Only that blood of Christ gave him peace in that holy presence.

We have been redeemed by Christ's blood. We stand before the holy God confessing our horrible sins and are at peace covered in Christ's holy blood. When our guilty consciences and the fear of death war against our souls, the blood of Christ declares peace to our troubled hearts and minds.

Such peace for our souls is born of heavenly love even in the midst of sufferings. Paul holds out for us to grasp the golden chain that links us to "the hope of the glory of God." God promises no bed of roses, no pleasure cruise, through life for the Christian. The theology of glory is Satan's lie.

We live under our crosses especially on account of our attachment to Christ. They serve a good purpose, "But we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering works perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us."

The Holy Spirit reminds us through the apostle's pen that Jesus Christ did not die for righteous or even good people; though some rare people might do that. Jesus died for sinners, for his enemies in the war that began in Eden. Reconciliation is the cessation of war. Since Christ saved us by his death when we were his enemies, we trust his new life in his resurrection will save us in the day of God's wrath, Judgment Day. And so "we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation."

The holy angels no longer guard the entrance to the Garden of Eden. No flashing sword prevents us from taking and eating of the former Tree of Life so we would remain in misery and war with God forever.

The inspired words of Holy Scripture lead us to another place. They clearly mark our pathway as bright lines of light illumine aisles in a darkened movie theatre. They keep us on the path to our tree of life, to the tree of Jesus' cross on Calvary, for our food that gives immortality and incorruption, and peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. <SDG>