

Romans 5:1-5 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent [Reminiscere] 21.2.2016

*At Peace with God!*

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. <sup>2</sup> Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

<sup>3</sup> We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. <sup>4</sup> And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. <sup>5</sup> And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. [NLT]

Imagine that you are given the opportunity to wish for anything you would like - and it is guaranteed that your wish will be granted. [No it's not a genie in a bottle] So what would you wish for? Of course the standard answer in church to any question is 'Jesus' - but I'm quite sure that our first instinct is to wish for something more material.

Having a wish fulfilled - what Paul writes about here, is that through faith in Jesus Christ we have so much more than we could imagine. We are now

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Having peace with God - what is that all about?

The thing is that our actions have consequences. This morning as I was reaching into the fridge to get the container with filter coffee in it, I touched a container that had little tomatoes in it, and as the container fell over the tomatoes spilt over the floor. Mostly we know what to do in such a case - [we call for Mom]. The normal thing would be to bend down (with a heavy sigh), and to pick up what was spilt. What happened here was that as a result of my slight clumsiness I became 'guilty' of spilling the tomatoes. In this case it is quite easy to 'fix' the consequences of my actions - and so to remove my 'guilt'.

What do you do, however, in the case of the young motorist - apparently under the influence of alcohol, who a few weeks ago on an early Sunday morning

drove into a group of cyclists who were passing an off-ramp on the M4. How does one deal with this kind of guilt? Have you ever had the feeling: I wish that I could just turn back the clock a few minutes, and do that all over again? But that won't do it in this case.

The consequences this young man has to deal with have to do with the families of those who died. I was told that the wife of one of the men killed was riding in the group - how do you face a woman whose husband you have just killed by your negligence? But there is also the question of how you face your own family - and how do they deal with you? And last, but by no means least, there are the consequences with the law of the land.

Dealing with the consequences of our actions. Paul writes earlier in this letter to the Romans (3:23): **For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.** Even if we are not aware of what we have done, we all have to carry the consequences of our actions.

But what is this 'sin'? It is nothing less than the fact that we have turned away from him who created us. It is that we have chosen to follow our own thinking of what is right or wrong (that we have been tempted to do this does not in any way lessen our guilt), and have pushed away the One who knows us better than any other, and who knows what is right for us, and what not. It is that we have turned from the Father, who loves us and have followed paths, where we do things we think we would love to do - only they so often turn out to be so much less than we had hoped [The big realisation Adam and Eve came to after they had eaten the forbidden fruit was that they were naked - and they now had to hide before God.]

Where do you go? - how do you hide before the One who knows all?

All have sinned, but Paul writes in the next verse: **Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.** (Romans 3:24-25)

Where do you go when you feel guilty, when you can't cope with the consequences of what you have done? God took our guilt for rebelling against

him - for pushing him out of the centre of our world and our lives - and put it on his Son. Our guilt has been removed - we need do nothing more than accept this gift of God: to trust and firmly hold on to what Jesus did on our behalf, and to receive the peace with God, which we need to live.

[We need to remember that God needs to be at the centre of all things, because that is the only way things are really right. He does not demand to stand there, because he gets anything by it, but so that we will be in the right space!]

We see and hear it over and over that our world needs nothing more than this peace - and we have it right here! Why is it that so few people know about this? Could it be that have not really understood who we really are as a congregation and church, and what we have right here?

At the time of the Reformation this central message had been all but lost. One of the driving forces for Luther was the question of how he could be put right with God - how he could find peace with God. During his searching he come on the verses I quoted earlier from Romans 3. From then his life was changed. From trying all kinds of fasting and other practices of the time to attain peace with God, he received the peace which God gives.

What do you wish above all else? No matter what our wishes are, what we need above all else, is the peace which God has given. It may be that we still have to bear the consequences of what we have done with regard to other people, and that we may have to face the law and receive the punishment this places on us. But we may do so in the knowledge that we have a peace which is beyond anything this world can give.

God has given us so much more than we could ever dream of having: **Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.**

Who would ever have dreamt of wishing that: to live with God in his glory - and to remain there!