



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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March 17, 2010

Midweek Lenten Worship

[Romans 5:1-11](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

### **Peace With God Through Our Lord Jesus Christ**

Peace with God...in a very true sense you and I, although we know we have this through Christ, we don't have it perfectly yet, do we? Think back to when people did have perfect peace with God. You have to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. God had put the man and the woman, Adam and Eve, in that Garden. He charged them with caring for it and ruling over the world and taking care of the Garden and things like that. They lived in a world that was perfect. When he made everything, God said it was very good. That included those two trees that were in the Garden. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life. Every time they walked past the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they didn't eat from it. Every time they ate from the Tree of Life, they were growing closer to God and enjoying that peace more perfectly as they honored and thanked him for everything that he had given them. That was perfect peace.

You and I, although we know we are forgiven through faith in Christ and we know that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; do you ever have your sinful nature telling you, "If God never would have put that Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden, they never would have sinned." So we are just standing side by side with Adam and Eve after they fell into sin when they blamed everyone else but themselves for the fall into sin, right?

In the beginning, Adam and Eve weren't spiritually hampered like you and I are, because we have that sinful nature that thinks that way. They knew God perfectly, but because they embraced the devil's temptation, the devil's lies about God, that God was keeping something good from them by not letting them eat from that one tree, they got all turned around and thought good was bad and bad was good and they ate from the tree. And all of a sudden the world came crashing down. They heard God coming in the Garden and they tried to hide from the almighty God. They sewed together some fig leaves to put on clothes because now they were ashamed of their nakedness. When God found them, he told them about all the other problems that were going to come...the pain in childbirth, the desire for the husband, and the husband would no longer be the perfect leader like God had wanted him to be. There would now be pain and strife and discord in the workplace. "By the sweat of your brow you will tend the soil all the days of your life." (See [Genesis 3:19](#).) And ever since then, children have rebelled against parents, employees haven't always gotten along the greatest, bosses

and employees, management and labor haven't always gotten along all that well. We've been reaping what they sowed back then when they fell away from God ever since. We are not born into this peace. We don't have it when we come into this world.

That's why God took that flaming sword and put it back and forth in front of the Garden and the angels were there to keep them from going back in because now if they continue to eat from that Tree of Life, they would live forever in a world that was just full of discord, the absence of peace, and they wouldn't have the blessings that God really wanted them to have. All this discord and those problems that we have on the face of this earth are not even a brief glimpse of the agony that awaits us in hell. So in order to keep them from living forever in this discord, he kept them from getting back to the Tree of Life. And because humans sinned, and God has made clear the wages of sin is death, there would have to be death to pay for that sin.

Just like in the Service of Word and Sacrament right before Communion when we say, "The devil who overcame us by a tree might by a tree be overcome," as we go back to Christ crucified, we go back to the tree of the cross and see in that cross how we now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have it now, imperfectly because we still have that old self, that sinful nature, but it's only through Christ crucified that there can be any peace between us and God.

That's what Paul said. He said, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The peace he is talking about is not what so many people think of when they misuse the Scripture word of peace. Blessed are the peacemakers...that is applied often whenever there are negotiations between warring countries. That's not the kind of peace God is talking about. That's not the kind of peace Paul is talking about here. He's not talking about neighbors getting along, husbands and wives getting along, bosses and employees getting along, or nations getting along. He's talking about peace with God, what we don't have by nature because we are sinners and we are God's enemies by nature, as Paul so clearly says in here.

This peace is the peace that God gives to us. If we think of it only in terms of this world, we sell it so far short. We just miss the boat. We miss what God is trying to tell us. Our greatest need is peace with God because of that disunity that comes about because of the fall into sin. When we understand that, we see how Jesus can at the same time be called the Prince of Peace. Yet, when he came to this earth he said, "I have not come to bring peace but a sword." (See [Matthew 10:34](#).) As we live in this peace between us and God, there is a part of us that doesn't like it, our old self, our sinful nature. Our sinful nature does not want to submit to God's will. When our new self says, "This is what we are going to do to serve God and love God," the devil is right there just like he was with Adam and Eve in the Garden saying, "God's trying to keep you from all the fun in life." He bucks and hollers against everything that God wants us to do. Not only that, the world around us that doesn't have peace with God, that

doesn't believe Jesus is their Lord and Savior, is not a friend to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God tells us that if we are a friend to the world and we don't carry the cross that he puts in front of us, then we are not a Christian either.

He's told us over and over in Scripture that when the cross comes, there will be suffering because there is not this peace by nature. Even after we experience peace with God, those around us don't like having it. Luther wrote about that in his lecture on the Romans. He wrote, "A righteous man has peace with God but distress in the world because he lives in the Spirit. An unrighteous man has peace with the world but the stress and tribulation of God because he lives in the flesh. But just as the Spirit is eternal, so the peace of the righteous and the tribulation of the unrighteous will be eternal. And just as the flesh is temporal, so the tribulation of the righteous and the peace of the unrighteous will be temporal."

There will be difficulty in this world, but we constantly focus on this great truth of our God that Paul said. He says, "through whom (Christ) we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand" (Romans 5:2). When we stand in this peace, we are standing in Christ. His grace, his undeserved love for us has taken away our sins. He lived perfectly in our place because you and I can't be perfect. Then he died in our place so that we wouldn't have to face the death that our sins deserve. And because we stand in this grace, Paul says "we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). We rejoice in hope.

Hope here doesn't mean a wish. It means a confidence. It's termed hope because we don't have it perfectly yet. We don't have the full glory of God now. We can't see it. We believe it and we live it by faith, but we can't see it. If we could see it, it wouldn't be hope. It would be what we are experiencing, the joy of heaven. But we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. We put our trust in God because God doesn't lie, and we live and rejoice in that hope. When we rejoice in that hope, Paul tells us it also means that "we rejoice in our sufferings" (Romans 5:3).

That has to be one of the hardest concepts for us to grasp on this side of heaven, and I am convinced it is something that an unbeliever can absolutely never grasp. The sinful self in us does not want to suffer. It wants things to go well. It wants wealth. It wants health. It wants power. It wants prestige. It wants other people to look at us and say, "there goes a really good person." It doesn't want the suffering that comes about because we are connected to Christ.

Some have gone into the world and proclaimed Christ and then promised that "in this Christ, if you follow him as faithfully as you can, you will be healthy and wealthy all your life and only good things will come to you." If you've skimmed the New Testament, you see our God talking all the time about suffering. Because he suffered, we also will suffer. And some of that suffering comes from that old self that's in us, the old self that wants those things to go well. When it doesn't go well, it wants to blame God and point the finger at God and say, "God, it's all your fault. Why don't you love me. Why did you let this happen." Some of the suffering comes about from inside of us. Some of it

comes from outside of us when people attack us as though we are backward fools because we believe that a Jewish carpenter who died 2,000 years ago took away our sins.

There is always going to be suffering. But as Christians, we rejoice in our sufferings. When suffering comes, it kicks off those crutches that the old self wants to rely on, whether it's health or wealth or power or prestige or financial gain. Whatever it is, when we are suffering, one of those crutches has been kicked out from under us and we can't lean on it for our strength anymore. So as a Christian, then I am forced to lean more on my God as I am driven back into his Word for help because I see that I can't do it on my own. The more I am driven into my God, the more I see him in Word and Sacrament, the more I am strengthened and the more I will rejoice in those sufferings because it makes me stronger because I rely on my God and not on myself or the things of this world. It doesn't mean I'm giddy and happy all the time. That's not the kind of joy he is talking about. It's the joy of knowing that I have a God who loves me that much that he tells me this. "You are going to suffer, but it's going to serve a greater purpose."

He says that suffering produces perseverance, that ability that as I lean more on God, I can endure more than I could on my own. Perseverance produces character. The more I get close to God, the more I am shaped by God and I live for him, not my own sinful nature. I deny myself. I take up my cross and follow him because that is my character. I love my God and I want to serve my God more and more. Character brings us right back to where we started...hope.

We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God and "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God" (Romans 5:3-5) does not lie. If you are ever tempted to think that your God has lied to you, that he doesn't love you, or that he's letting you suffer because he just likes to watch you squirm, or any of those silly notions that the old self has inside of us, then think about what else Paul said to us. He said, "At just the right time when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man, someone might possibly dare to die." You can understand the truth of that, right?

If you are serving in the Armed Forces and a grenade is there in the middle of the troupes and someone throws themselves on it, they deny themselves and they sacrifice themselves to save their brothers in arms. That would be a heroic act. It would be something out of the ordinary, the unexpected. Very rarely will someone do this. When they do it, we are amazed at it.

But now picture this, this is what our God is telling us...can you picture that group of soldiers throwing their grenade at the enemy and then running and diving on the grenade to save the enemy? Can you picture that happening? Of course not. That's foolishness. That's silliness, right? But listen to what our God says. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "For if,

when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Romans 5:10).

The tree of life that we call the cross, Jesus threw himself on the grenade of his enemies. You, me and the rest of the world. Therefore we have peace with God. Live in it. Rejoice in it.