

Lent 2011 at Brentwood Presbyterian

Resilient Hope

March 27, 2011

Psalm 95 & Roman 5:1-11
(Hymns – 210, 211, 786 [St. Michael tune], 768)

Paul's letter to the Romans
is one of the great classics
in the Christian literature of spiritual formation.
It's focus is on what the Good News translation,
in this passage we read this morning,
calls beings friends with God.

The NRSV talks about being reconciled to God.
Others use language like "peace with God" and "intimacy with God."

As we have seen time and again in our study of the Scriptures,
human language cannot contain the mystery of God's grace
enacted and revealed for us in Jesus Christ,
but it can powerfully point to the reality and impact of that grace.
That's why we worship and follow the living Word of God in Jesus Christ,
present among us and in this world
in the work and influence of the Holy Spirit.

The words of the Scriptures are important and authoritative
insofar as the Spirit uses them to witness to this living Word.
But Scripture always points beyond itself
to the flourishing life created and sustained by God's amazing grace in Christ.

That is what Paul is expressing
with exuberant and energetic thanksgiving
in this passage.

He uses the language of boasting,
not something that comes easily to most of us.
The root of the Greek word is *kauchema*,
used by philosophers in the negative sense of self-glorifying.
In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures,
it is the basic attitude of fools and the ungodly,
except for a couple of places where it used to point to
rejoicing and glorifying God.
That's how it's used in one of my favourite passages
from the writings of the prophet Jeremiah:

*Thus says the Lord:
do not let the wise boast in their wisdom,
do not let the mighty boast in their might,
do not let the the wealthy boast in their wealth,
but let those who boast boast in this,
that they understand and know me,
that I am the Lord;
I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth,
for in these things I delight,
says the Lord.
(Jer 9:23-24)*

I'm not sure, but I suspect this is the kind of boasting Paul has in mind.
He uses the word three times in these 11 verses,
first and foremost in vs.2 where is writes of boasting
"of the hope we have of sharing God's glory!"

This is the kind of boasting
that Christians should do with exuberant abandon.
This kind of boasting lies at the heart of Christian enthusiasm.
This kind of boasting lies at the heart of Christian flourishing.

But it's important to remember the true source
of this encouragement to boast.

For Jeremiah, the only source of this boasting
is the gift of understanding and knowing the Lord,
not just with the understanding of the mind
but also with the intimacy of a deep loving relationship.
We understand best what we love most.
And our love of God is always a response to his love for us.

For Paul, the only source of this boasting
is the gift of faith through the work of the Holy Spirit
(parallel to Jeremiah's understanding and knowing)
that reconciles us,
that restores friendship and intimacy,
with God.

We are gifted anew in God's eyes
with the innocence of Adam and Eve in the garden.

That innocence is not first and foremost a moral quality,
but a state of being unfettered and unimpeded
in our intimate friendship with God.
This is the true source of our resilient hope.

We've looked at Christian resilience before,
but I wanted to review those 10 ways of being resilient Christians
adapted from the work of the American Psychological Association.

- 1. Make connections with people in ways that bless them**
Establishing good relationships with others to both help and be helped strengthens resilience.
- 2. Don't view crises in life as insurmountable problems**
You choose how to interpret and respond to the things that happen to you. You can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, see anything as an opportunity to grow in your faith.
- 3. Accept that change is a part of life**
Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on the circumstances you can change. Find positive potential and pursue it.
- 4. Do something to move towards realistic goals, one step at a time**
Ask yourself "What's the one thing I can do in this moment to move forwards in fulfilling my calling to be a blessing in Jesus Christ?"
- 5. Take actions that are decisive, consciously choosing to use your gifts**
You always have the freedom to decide how to use your strengths and talents in the service of Christ's kingdom. Use that freedom to flourish faithfully.
- 6. Look for opportunities to grow in your appreciation of life in Jesus Christ**
Enjoy the teachable spirit God has given you in Christ, exploring with the Spirit all the positive possibilities that exist in the midst of challenges and crises.
- 7. Nurture a positive view of yourself as a beloved friend of Jesus Christ**
We were created in God's image, male and female, to be a blessing in God's name. Accept the dignity of that calling and live with confidence in your God-given abilities to overcome the barriers to flourishing in the faith.
- 8. Keep things in their proper perspective, trusting in God's providential care**
Even in the face of painful events and fearful feelings, remember God's providential care and don't blow problems out of proportion.
- 9. Maintain a hopeful outlook, again trusting that God is in charge**
A hopeful attitude helps you provoke love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:22-23) Try visualizing the good you want to accomplish rather than worrying about what you fear.
- 10. Take care of yourself, working with God in the whole process of growth**
Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Nourish your body, mind, heart, and soul. God wants you to take care of your whole self so you are strong in being a blessing in situations that require resilience.

This is the kind of Christian life that made Paul so exuberant.
This is the kind of Christian life that nourishes the gift of flourishing.