**Romans 5:1-11**

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **3** More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. **6** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. **10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. **11** More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

**“Reconciled Suffering”**

 Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Of all the seasons in the Church year, Lent takes on the toughest questions and most painful truths of life. Jesus tells His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” There is not even a socialized fairness when it comes to suffering. All face trials, tribulations, and troubles, but they fall upon us and affect us in unique ways. This is why Christ cares to gather all to His eternal sacrifice. Faith is vital for such good news to be a benefit in our life. Nevertheless, the Father has already reconciled a suffering world in His Son.

 When St. Paul wrote the letter of Romans, it was a couple of decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians in Rome certainly dealt with more than the natural hardship of life. They felt adversity of another kind. It was the new life given to them by baptism into the Name of Jesus. The temptation in suffering was to turn away from the cross and to abandon the promise of baptism. Since pains and problems hid in the mystery of God, St. Paul proclaimed what was out in the open, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The true comfort was not in works or the way life played out, but the right relationship given by God’s grace. The reconciling work of Christ lets the suffering stand on Him.

 Suffering leaves irreconcilable differences that stand against God. More than the problem of evil is the problem of suffering. I did everything right that I was supposed to do! Why did God let this happen to my loved one? How long is this going to last? St. Paul tells us the reason for this desperation saying, “We were still weak.” Actually, the Greek word for “weak” is better translated, “powerless or helpless.” You know; when our works come up short, when the law hammers away relentlessly, or when death shuts the door on life.

 The gap of suffering is irreconcilably bigger than being weak. St. Paul says, “We were still sinners.” That is a sorry fact that sticks with us even after baptism. Sin drags us into all kinds of suffering. Selfish words and acts drive a wedge into relationships. Addictions end up running life as if they are in charge. Gossip and coveting can spread pain all over the place. Greed keeps consuming and never gives. False glories get in the way of God’s Word to worship what will not last. We certainly suffer as sinners by our own hands.

 The gap of suffering is more like an irreconcilable chasm against God. St. Paul says, “We were still enemies.” This is what Jesus straight up told Peter when he tried to rebuke Him saying, “Get behind me Satan.” Most are okay with god floating around like a nice guy. The one that does not get too involved in my life unless I need him. Only the cross gets in our face drawing the line to prove man is an enemy of God. The violent do this with hatred and shouts of “crucify him.” The cunning do it by running from the cross for a way or look to cover up the offense. Suffering has left us unreconciled to God and alone to self.

 Christ stands to reconcile suffering by His death as the answer for all. “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” The Lord of power and might dares to be weak, dares to die for us. God stumbles down the road bearing His cross. Helpless and defenseless, Jesus opens Himself up to every form of suffering. The Law hammers away at His perfect life. The works of ungodly man fall short on Him. The door of death shuts in His face. Yet, God’s love pours out in every drop of blood and painful Word He spoke to be comfort put into our hearts.

 The gap of suffering closes in a bigger way than merely for the weak. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Drowned is the sinner into the death of Jesus by baptism. This daily treasure tells us Christ forgives the suffering of sin caused by my own hand. It is to hear the call, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” Rather than a wedge, Jesus basis for relationship to you is on His death. Rather than false glory, Jesus’ lives with glory to justify you by His Word and deed.

 The suffering that was once a chasm against God is no longer existent. “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” Christ freely stepped in the way of God’s wrath stored up for His enemies. Christ also freely turned by His sacrifice to save the enemy. He suffered and died to fight against our true enemy the Devil. The cross draws the line proving God’s love is bountiful. Christ reconciles suffering so that all can confess Him. “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

 Now even suffering lets us stand reconciled with peace upon Christ. The weight of what we do only keeps turning to hear what Jesus speaks as a better promise. The comfort we seek to feel out only continues to receive what Jesus gives by His true body and blood. Luther says, “…those who are so presumptuous as to believe that they can approach God without Christ…as if thus by faith alone, but not through Christ …as if beyond Christ they no longer needed Him…” (LW Vol. 25). How has God reconciled your suffering? How does the weak find hope to live another day? How does the sinner receive the right to be a saint? How does the enemy put down his hostility? “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

 What a devilish trick that in times of suffering likes ours. The crucified Christ has no place for many people. To some He is more a threat than a true Savior. His Word and Sacrament a ritual of man rather than God’s presence act work for man. Lord have mercy. For all suffer in life, but only the baptized have the answer to all suffering. It is why we dare even to travel down this road of Lent. St. John bears witness, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient and even transforms suffering. What are signs of death in our life now produce endurance, character, and hope with prayers that say, “But deliver us from evil.” The reconciling work of Christ lets the suffering stand on Him. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.