

10/28/2018

## “The Blessings of God’s Grace”

Scripture: Romans 5:1-5 (6-8); John 3:16-17

**We are saved and justified by God’s grace through faith and blessed in many wonderful ways by the Holy Spirit given to us through Christ.**

### **Romans 5:1-5 (6-8) NRSV**

*“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”*

**Today is observed in many churches as Reformation Sunday.**

As described by Dean McIntyre of the United Methodist Discipleship Ministries . . .

“Reformation Day is a day set aside to recognize, remember, and celebrate the Protestant Reformation. In some countries, it is observed as an official holiday. It remembers Martin Luther and the central role he played in the reform movement that split the western church of Rome.”

Reformation Day is October 31 of every year. That is the day in 1517 when Dr. Martin Luther is believed to have nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

According to McIntyre and others, “It was Luther’s act that caused the initial furor that resulted in the Reformation. Luther had earned his Doctor of Theology degree in Wittenberg and was a respected professor there, as well as the assistant pastor of the Castle Church. Luther chose October 31 because it was the day before All Saints’ Day. The Castle Church’s front door opened on a main street of the city, and it was a good place to post a notice for public viewing. Luther knew that on the next day, November 1 — All Saints’ Day — the church would be filled with worshipers, many of whom were educated and literate. His act of posting his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door was the equivalent of publishing a journal article, taking out a newspaper ad, or putting up an Internet website today.”

“By these theses, Luther addressed a number of objectionable teachings and doctrines, including salvation by works and the practice of selling indulgences. These were actual certificates that people could purchase from the Church that absolved them of their sins and promised their salvation and eternal life. Pope Leo X called for the sale of indulgences in Germany to help raise money to complete the construction of Saint Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. The Pope said that those who purchased these indulgences would be absolved of all sin. Some of Luther’s parishioners purchased these indulgences and asked Luther about their validity. This led directly to his posting of the *95 Theses*.”

“Luther argued that salvation could not be obtained by purchasing indulgences, through works of charity, by making a pilgrimage, or by performing other acts of piety and devotion. He argued that salvation was an act of God, given by grace through our faith in Jesus Christ. God has already provided for our salvation by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and salvation is ours to accept through faith, not to achieve through works . . .

“As United Methodists today, nearly 500 years after the start of the Reformation, what is its significance to us? Why even observe it? After all, we are not the descendants of Luther. Our roots are deep in the Anglican tradition: Both John and Charles Wesley were priests in the Church of England.”

And, I’m sure that many here today were not raised as Methodists or United Methodists, and don’t really know or care about some of the particular differences between denominations; but care about that which we share, and brings us together, and makes us one.

I agree with our United Methodist Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships, which says that we “celebrate the spirit of continuing reformation in the church”.

I believe that there are a number of reasons we should observe the day. Some of the themes of the Reformation remain as themes and principles of our own faith today. And, though the great schism that occurred in the church remains with us, our fractured denominations have entered into dialogue and cooperative activities that have brought us closer together. As McIntyre says, “Today we may observe Reformation Day with a sense of moving toward unity and community. It is an opportunity to repent of the sins and excesses of the past and to celebrate our common faith, even if we still cannot (always) celebrate a common ritual and sacrament. Reformation today can represent healing of old wounds as, together, we all work to build and strengthen Christ's church and love one another as Christ has loved us.”

With all of that being said, let’s focus on our theme for today, **The Blessings of God’s Grace**. When we usually think of blessings, we may think of life, health, family & friends, and material things like wealth, food clothing or shelter. But, today I want us to consider even more wonderful blessings than even these. . . The blessings of God’s grace.

**For, we are saved and justified by God’s grace through faith and1 blessed in many wonderful ways by the Holy Spirit given to us through Jesus Christ.**

**Jesus Christ >>> Grace**

John the evangelist says of Jesus in his gospel account (John 1:14): “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

And later, in the third chapter we read the bible verses that have meant so much to me since childhood (John 3:16-17) . . . “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*”

**Jesus Christ is God's gift, or grace, given to humankind and all the world.** He freely came into this world to show us, and be for us, the way back to God. What greater blessing than that could there be?!

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the early believers and seekers in Rome, gives us a beautiful explanation and witness of this wonderful truth, and the subsequent blessings of God's amazing grace.

Consider them again as you hear them . . .

### † **Justification/Salvation**

*“. . . we are justified by faith,” Paul shortly after this adds: “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!” (v.9)*

Are you worried about what will happen to you after you die? You can rest assured with the blessings of God's grace!

### † **Peace/Reconciliation**

*“we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”*

We have peace with God, not merely a subjective feeling or peace of mind, which is wonderful to have -- but an objective status, a new relationship with God.

And, we have hope in sharing the glory of God someday! What a wonderful blessing indeed!

### † **Forgiveness**

Justification, salvation, reconciliation and peace come from being forgiven of our sins by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

As Paul said . . .

*“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person -- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”*

*“For if, while 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! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Romans 5:6-8, 10-11 (NRSV)*

Your sins can be forgiven. All you need do is ask with trust in God's loving mercy.

### † **Perseverance/Endurance**

Do you wonder sometimes how or if you can make it through life's challenges and

circumstances? The good news is, you are not alone. God is always with you. And, whatever your hardships, God cares for you. Jesus has endured this earthly life. He endured suffering and shame, even death upon a cross. And, just as God did not abandon him, but raised him from death, so we, too, can endure what we face.

As Paul spoke from his own personal experience . . .

*“And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Rom. 5:3-6)*

So, to those other blessings already given, we can add . . .

### † **Character**

A follower of Jesus can rejoice in one's suffering, because they know it is not meaningless, for it produces character; a character of strength and witness to others. There are still many Christians throughout the world who are persecuted and even tortured for their faith; for worshiping openly or witnessing it to others.

Most or all of us know stories of someone who has endured illness, disease or other hardships in life, and who have been great examples of faith and perseverance for us. I know I have.

And, the challenging changes and circumstances I may have experienced have taught me lessons of faith, patience and perseverance. They have also reassured me to have hope in God's plan for my life.

### † **Hope**

I believe that hope is one of greatest needs in our society and world today. For me, it is a hope based on my relationship with God; knowing that God loves me and is always with me. It is based on trusting that God has a future and a plan for me, even though I may not see it all during times of trials and tribulations.

As the NIV Study Bible says, “The believer's hope is not to be equated with unfounded optimism. On the contrary, it is the blessed assurance of our future destiny and is based on God's love, which is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit and objectively demonstrated to us in the death of Christ.” (ibid.)

### **Holy Spirit >>> God's Love >>> Our Hearts**

So . . .

Which of God's blessings mentioned by Paul are you wanting?

Which have you received?

How have you sought forgiveness or justification from God?

Have you placed your trust or faith in God's grace through Jesus Christ?

If you have done so yet, I invite you to pray with me now. Simply bow your head and repeat

these words in your heart . . . “Dear Jesus, forgive my sins and come into my heart. I receive you as my Savior and Lord.” If you have just prayed with me, I invite and encourage to join in further fellowship and learning as a follower of Jesus. And, may each and every one receive and know the blessings of God's grace today and through your life!