

“God’s Love Poured Out”

Romans 5: 1-5

It is funny how things have a way of working out in our lives. Never could I have imagined that a Scripture I picked months ago would be exactly what we would need to hear today. Never would I have imagined that a Scripture I picked out months ago would be exactly what we would need to hear today to help us move forward in the midst of disaster. When I picked out this Scripture, I was really just looking at a small snippet of Paul’s letter to the Romans, a small sample in which he was trying to give them reassurances, a small sample in which he was trying to answer their questions of why? Never could I have imagined that, this past week, as we continued to watch the scenes from OK and hear the stories of both life and death, that this scripture I picked out months ago would be exactly what we would need to hear as we began to question and wonder the very same things. Why do bad things happen? What is the purpose of it all? What is the meaning behind all of it? Where was God in all of this? Why didn’t God try to prevent it from happening?

Like Paul in our text today, I’m not sure that I know all the answers but I do know one thing: Hope does not and will not disappoint us as people of faith. Of

that I am sure. And I invite you to turn in your pew Bibles to Romans 5: 1-5 to hear why I am so sure of this promise.

(Read the text)

In our text today, Paul tells the people in the Roman church that even in the darkest moments, they have nothing to worry about because they have already experienced the promises of God's grace. He goes on to remind them that they are already where they wanted to be: in the glory of God. The doors were open wide. It is theirs for the taking! They can boast in this blessing.

And he says that's not even the most outrageous part! They can also boast in their suffering as well! That this blessing of God's grace can never be taken away from them, no matter what the world throws at them. God's love is being outpoured for all of God's children. Hope will not disappoint them. Paul tells them to go on and celebrate!

Now I'm sure that when the community in Rome heard Paul's words, they all thought he was crazy. How could he be so flippant? How could he be so naïve? They were really suffering here and all he could offer them was a seemingly insensitive phrase like "have hope". That seemed pretty cold and callous.

And I would tend to agree. Probably most mental health officials would tell us that Paul's advice doesn't seem to be the best advice, in light of the people's

suffering. He seems to minimize the problem. Paul seems to sweep their suffering under the rug without ever really addressing their issues.

But I would also say that before we get too upset, we need to give Paul a little credit as well. When Paul gave this advice to the people in Rome, Paul was speaking out of his own experience. He too had experienced suffering all for the sake of the Gospel. He had been beaten. He had been thrown in jail. He had everything taken away from him, all because he was a committed follower of Jesus Christ in a time when that was not looked upon too highly. For the most, Paul didn't have the easiest job. He didn't get paid huge salaries to speak to large crowds of people about God. He didn't get to stay in luxury hotels or eat in five star restaurants. More often than not, it was the other way around. He usually was as low as he could be on his travels, sometimes shipwrecked. He was often seen as the outcast, even a few times had stones thrown at him and most of the time, he was run out of town all because people didn't like what he was saying. All in all, Paul knew suffering. Paul knew darkness. So when he told the people, to go on and boast in the blessings of God's Glory in good times as well as in bad times, he knew what he was talking about. he was speaking from experience and yes he knew how ridiculous he sounded.

Paul probably would have been the first to admit that it would have been easier for him to go back to the life he knew before he knew Christ. But he

couldn't do that. He was no longer that person. He had been changed, changed by God's love and grace. And this change, this transformation was not an experience that he was willing to forget had happened just for the sake of an easier, seemingly simpler life. So he made a choice and that choice opened him up to a new way, a way that freed him, to a way that opened his eyes to God's blessings, a way that brought him more joy than he could ever imagine.

So yeah, Paul knew how ridiculous he sounded. And yes Paul knew how insensitive he sounded when he responded to the people's pain with a phrase like "Hope does not disappoint" but he also knew it to be true. He had experienced it. Deep in his heart, he knew and experienced that hope does not disappoint. He wasn't being insensitive. He wasn't being flippant. And he certainly wasn't being naïve. When Paul gave the people this advice, he was sharing his faith. He was being faithful. He was being honest. He was telling his story. He was sharing what he knew to be true. All because he had experienced it in his life, on his journeys, in his sufferings, time and time again. He had experienced the promise and power of hope. He had experienced the blessing and had the understanding that hope does not and will not disappoint.

Just like we do today. That's what we would be sharing with all those who are hurting today, with all those who are wondering why. That's what we would be

saying to all those who are questioning God, questioning our faith, no matter how ridiculous it may sound. We would say that Hope does not disappoint.

And we are not saying this as a quick band-aid for all the hurt and we are not certainly saying this as a way for us to quickly move on from the pain. We are saying this as a people of faith. We are saying what we know to be true. We know and have experienced the fact that Hope does not disappoint.

Time and time again, This simple statement has reminded me, has reminded us, that God has never failed us before and God will not fail us this time or any other time. It has given us the strength to be a rock for those who are hurting, and it has allowed others to be a rock for us when we are hurting as well. Hope does not disappoint. Love does will every time. We know God is in control.

When we say hope does not disappoint, we are not making light of the suffering in OK. We are not making light of the suffering in our community. We are not making light of the suffering in our nation and in our world. We are reminding ourselves, that even though it may seem like death and darkness has the last word, it is not true. Love will win every time. And hope will not disappoint us.

Now I'll be honest and say, that yes there have been times, when I forgotten this statement. There have been times when we all have forgotten this statement. And I am sure that there will continue to be times when we will forget this

statement. It is easy to do especially when we are facing moments in our lives when it seems like the darkness is going to overtake us, or facing moments when we feel like the darkness has already overtaken us. It is so easy to forget that hope does not disappoint when we aren't even sure which way is up anymore.

But there is something we have to remember. As people of faith, we were never promised that we would not have darkness in our lives. We were never promised that we would not have death as a part of our lives. We were never promised that only good things would happen for us. What we were promised is that as Paul says, suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And that hope will not disappoint because God's love has never disappointed us before, nor will it ever!

Sure we know this in our heads, but sometimes it is hard to remember this in our hearts, especially when all we begin to focus on is the suffering. It is so hard to remember, to remember that hope does not disappoint, to remember that love will always win especially when our hearts are so heavy with grief. But we must. That's why Paul tells us to boast in blessings of God's grace and to boast in moments of suffering as well. Because it serves as a reminder that the Light will always win. It serves as a reminder that the story is not done. That God is still creating, that God is still working on making things right.

We are not so naïve to think it will be good for us all the time. We've all had moments in our lives when it felt like the darkness was so real, moments when it really did feel like death had won, moments where it felt like our whole world had shattered and we weren't even sure how to pick up the pieces, or that we even had the strength to do so.

But we didn't stay there in that dark place. Somehow, some way, we picked ourselves up in the midst of the darkness, and moved toward the light. It wasn't easy. And for some, maybe for all of us, that journey from darkness to light is still going on. Maybe that journey never really stopped. And as much as we don't like it, we admit, that sometimes, those dark moments still sneak up on us, and still threaten to drag us back down into the pit of darkness. But we don't let it, all because we know hope does not disappoint.

We aren't saying this because we are insensitive. We aren't saying this to be flippant or to make light of the sufferings around us. We say that hope does not disappoint because we know it to be true.

We have been able to come out of the darkness time and time again, not because we have some superhuman strength inside ourselves, and not because we are better than anyone else who is suffering or in pain.

We were and are able to come out of the darkness time and time again because we have one thing that never disappoints us, something that never fails us.

We have one thing that breaks through the darkness and fills our world with light each and every time. And that is hope!

We stay grounded in the hope that everything is going to be okay even when we don't know what that new existence of okay is going to be or look like. We stay grounded in the hope that everything is going to be okay even when we don't know who we are going to be in that new reality of okay either. Sometimes all we know is that it is going to be okay because we know deep down that hope does not and will not disappoint. Because the story is not done yet. That God is still creating, that God is still working to make things right.

As people of faith, We have the promises of God, leading us and guiding us. We have the reassurances that God will never leave us in the darkness. We have the knowledge that our God is staying right here beside us, crying with us, hurting with us, getting angry at the senseless of it all with us. We know that God is right here pulling us out of the darkness some way or another.

As people of faith, we do not say this lightly nor do we say it as a quick fix. We say it because we know it to be true. we have seen the pain and darkness of the cross. we have seen the damage upon the head by the crown of thorns. we have seen the anguish as the nails were driven into the hands. And we know the story didn't end there. God worked, and God made it right.

We know that hope does not disappoint because we have seen the empty grave. We have experienced the resurrection. we have experienced God's love being poured out for all of us. So we can say with all certainty: Hope does not and will not disappoint, no matter how ridiculous we may sound. We have been changed by God's grace. We have been changed by God's love. And that transformation is not something that we can easily forget.

Hope does not disappoint. That serves as a reminder for all of us that God is still creating, that God is still making it right.

that is why I can stand up here in front of you and say that death and darkness will not have the last word. That is why I can look beyond the torn buildings and tear stained faces and see the light. And it is also what gives me the strength to stand beside the people in pain, to cry with them, to hurt with them. I know pain and hurt are not the end of the story. Darkness does not have the last word. God does. And love will win every time.

And until that moment comes, we have hope, a hope that does not disappoint, all because God's love has never fail us yet. That I know for sure.

May we always remember this, no matter how ridiculous it might sound.