

June 12, 2022

Romans 5:1-5

“Hurts So Good”

Does God love us or not? How do we know? It is not simply a modern thought pattern to wonder if we are on “*the outs*” with God because life is so hard. There is that curse in Genesis about Adam having to work harder than he might have and Eve having greater pain in childbirth which hints at *a baseline of challenge* for human living – yet, somehow when it is personal, and we feel it deeply – we wonder if we wound up on the wrong side of God and are paying for it.

One of the ways religious faiths have sought to face this life reality is to *urge compliance* so life will go better. This is a tricky point because we can be our own worst enemy and following guidance to make better choices can be helpful. But Paul is concerned we understand that while *choices have consequences*, **God’s love for us and the results of what Christ has done for us is not provisional**. Through the work of God in Christ *we have peace with God*. In our living we stand in grace. Our worrying that personal loss means we are in trouble with God is misguided: And can be devastating if we believe it.

And yet, we live with loss, sorrow, and disappointment. Living in a broken world is tough – but *navigating that world gets easier* when we know **God is not against us – and in the long run we can’t lose**. This is where Paul is taking us today in our reading. He knows full well many of the people in the church to whom he is writing have spent far too long discouraged in life – *because they have concluded hope is fleeting and God is against them*.

When we are discouraged, it is crucial we believe God is with us in the challenges of the moment – helping us move forward – so we may find the courage to live. The worst thing we can do is *forget* we have peace with God. It takes the wind right out of our sails if we imagine God has given up on us.

Paul also points out *the inner logic* of those moments of challenge means the cards are **stacked in our favor**. Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope which does not disappoint us. *The very things which seem to work against us will – in the end – strengthen our life in God*. This is extraordinarily good news. The very things we didn’t want to face will be ingredients to our growth and enrichment of life.

A helpful foothold in all of this comes from one of those smart German commentators on Scripture who says, Paul understands *existence is defined by its Lord*. So, when we succumb to the first temptation – which is to be *our own God* – our existence careens out of control because *we have mistakenly believed life is all about us*. And when circumstances make us miserable, we begin to imagine it is a reflection on us - a *devastating judgement on our worth*. We were never meant to be God. ***Our healthy life path is defined not by giving up – but by serving God instead of trying to be God.***

Years ago, I sought out a massage therapist on the advice of a church member when the muscles in my neck and back were so bad, I couldn't hold my head up. I had never had a massage and felt funny going to get one. But pain is a teacher and I needed help. I was not prepared for how much tension I was carrying in my back and neck. And there were moments when the kneading of the knots of muscles was not at all comfortable. But one would have to say, "*it hurt so good.*" I trusted the therapist because I trusted the person who sent me there. And when it was over, I sat in the car and couldn't drive for ten minutes because the relief was overwhelming.

We chart our course in life by what we consider worthy and *who* we consider our *Lord*. Thanks be to God ***in every season of our lives*** we can know – *God is with us and for us – and we can't lose*. It can hurt – but it can also *hurt so good* because we know *the difficulty of the moment* is going to take us to better places in the long run *by the grace of God*.

Does God love us? Through thick and thin. And when all is said and done, we will find the grace to live by love as God's children. It may hurt. But the goodness of God will always win out in the end.