

Rev. Dan Welch Lent 2 2-25-17

Text- Romans 5:1-5

Are you like me? Haven't you had about enough of this winter? I know, despite getting our fair-share of snow these past few days, it hasn't exactly been a very snowy winter. And while it has been a pretty **cold** winter, it hasn't been **the coldest** winter we Minnesotans have had to tough out. Still for me, anyways, this winter has gone on just about long enough! After a while, winter can be a dreary time of the year!

The good news is that Spring is less than a month away now! What's more, a couple of more weeks and it will bring Daylight savings time again. Before you know it the tulips will be blooming and the robins will be singing. So, there are definitely signs of hope!

And with Spring just around the corner, it will soon also be the ideal time of year to do some extra cleaning. I'm actually looking forward to sweeping and washing away all that built-up salt and grime off the floor of my garage, washing the windows around the house, and putting away all of the lingering Christmas decorations which haven't made it up to the attic yet. Yes, the list goes on and on. Along with the hopefulness of Spring, there are lots of things to do to clean up, to get rid of the clutter .

Lent is a time when we do that same sort of thing in with our life. As life goes on, different things pile up inside of us, sinful attitudes, sinful habits. Lent is a time when you take an inventory of your heart, and whatever sinful attitudes or habits are there, you get rid of them by receiving God's forgiveness which comes through His Word.

Today, God's Word focuses us on **hope**. And that means cleaning out and getting rid of things that make us dreary, drag us down, and diminish our hope. Have you ever felt a sense of dreariness? You feel glum, gloomy, negative, as you look at your life and the world around you.

When our kids were little one of my favorite movies to watch with them was "The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh". Of all the characters, including the lovable Pooh-bear himself, energetic Tigger, timid, little Piglet, and more, I always felt sorry for Eeyore the donkey. Poor Eeyore was always finding something to be down about, always the pessimist. He had a very negative outlook on life. For example, one time Winnie the Pooh asked Eeyore, "Lovely day, isn't it?" And Eeyore responded in true Eeyore fashion, "Wish I could say yes, but I can't." Yes, life was always dreary for poor Eeyore.

There are people like that in real life, always dreary. Maybe you know one and maybe they aren't always so lovable as Eeyore. You never really want to ask them how they are doing, because they always complain. All of us, at times, have felt a sense of dreariness, we feel down and we complain. Today, we're going to focus on **hope** over dreariness. As we study God's Word, you will see why you don't have to be dreary. Through His Word, God the Holy Spirit will work on your heart, and sweep away your dreariness, and fill you with joy.

What brings you down? Often times, it is your conscience. You become dreary when you think about your relationship with God. "I'll never be good enough," you say. "I make mistakes every

day. I don't do the things I know I should do as a Christian. I'll never be the kind of Christian that God wants me to be." That's our conscience talking, and our conscience does have a point. We are sinful people and we realize God has rules for our lives, rules that we have broken. This is God's law at work on your heart.

God has said to love other people and to love Him above all things – rules – and you and I haven't followed them like we should. In God's eyes, we're guilty of a breach of contract. We know it, and we're still not cooperating. Sure we can make excuses, ask for more time. Really, we would think that God would have enough with us; that God would declare all-out war on us and get us out of His way. The more you think about these things, the more depressed, the more dreary you begin to feel.

But instead of declaring all-out war on you, God has declared peace. Look at verse 1 of our text: "Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." God has declared peace, not war, between you and Him. Jesus has brought this peace into the world. And He did that not through negotiating between you and the Heavenly Father. He didn't ask for more time, and He didn't strike a deal. Jesus achieved peace between you and God by suffering, bleeding, and dying. He talked about this to His disciples in our Gospel lesson for today when He told them that He would have to "suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed, and after three days rise from the dead. (NIV)" This is how Jesus has made peace between you and God. To know this, to believe this – that

takes away our dreariness, and fills us with joy. That's God Gospel at work on your heart!

It's one of the few things in the world that's free. Believe it and it's yours. Verse one declares, "we have been justified through faith," not through good works. Peace through Jesus Christ is **free**, "through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace **in which we stand**." What do you see underneath your feet? You probably would say "the floor!" But here God tells you that you're standing in His grace. Everywhere you walk, everything you say and do, you are standing in grace. When you're having a bad day, when you fall into a sin, when you're frustrated by your sins, when your conscience is bothering you, remember what's underneath your feet – you are standing in **grace**. The free, undeserved love of God. Every sin you have ever committed is forgiven.

When your sins start to make you feel dreary, focus on **Jesus**. Focus on His cross, which covers your sins. Remember that in Christ, God has declared **peace** between you and Him. Let that be what causes you to rejoice, as the Apostle Paul says, "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Another reason we feel dreary in our lives is because life isn't easy. Sometimes we face problems. There often doesn't seem to be any purpose **to** our problems. "Why am I going through this," we ask ourselves. "There doesn't seem to be a point! Why this problem? Why right now?"

God doesn't always answer that question. But He does shed light on the good things that can **result** from suffering. Look at verses 3 and

following: “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings.” The Greek word for “sufferings” is an interesting one. It actually means pressure – to have different things pressing down on you. What is the modern day word for that? What’s the leading cause of insomnia, heart problems, high blood pressure? We call it “**stress**.” You could translate this verse to say, “Not only that, but we also rejoice when we are under pressure.” What are things that cause you stress? In the days of the Bible, stress was caused by persecution. Christians would have their jobs terminated, houses taken away. All kinds of things caused stress back then.

When you focus on all the things that cause you stress, you can become dreary very quickly. You can become depressed, down in the dumps, glum, worse than Eeyore. You can become a complainer who drags other people down. But here it says: “We rejoice in our sufferings.” Instead of complaining, we rejoice. How? Because as a Christian, you understand that God has a good purpose for your sufferings. He uses them for your good. Look at how Paul describes that here: “knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.” God uses suffering to change you for the better. When God allows you to be placed under pressure, He is developing in you the ability to endure. In other words, you become someone who doesn’t give up easily. When the going gets tough, you stay put, and you keep working to make things better.

Sufferings produce endurance. And endurance produces character. You become someone who has gone through

difficult moments in life, someone God can use you to help others. Endurance produces character. And character produces hope. Hope that God will work out all things for your good. Hope that a **better** life is coming, hope that God is blessing you every day, and **will** bless you forever on Judgment Day.

If a piece of coal could talk, what would it say? Maybe it would say, “I don’t like it very much when the earth is pressing down on me, and all the rocks are piled on top of me, and it’s hot, and I feel uncomfortable. I don’t like it. But that’s how a piece of coal becomes a diamond. All that pressure, all that heat, and after a period of time, that piece of coal becomes a beautiful diamond. You are like that piece of coal: under pressure, problems, difficulties. Some days, you can feel the heat. But God is changing you, working on you, transforming you into a beautiful creation that shines in His kingdom.

Jesus Christ, and His Word we’re studying today, changes the way you look at suffering. He told His disciples in our Gospel lesson that they would have to suffer. “Take up your cross and follow me,” He told them. But there’s no need to be dreary, to be down, when we think of suffering, because we know that Christ is with us, using our sufferings to mold us more and more into the Christians He wants us to be.

This is the hope we have. It’s not an earthly kind of hope. People always say, “Don’t get your hopes up,” because you can’t always trust that people will come through for you. But that’s not the kind of hope we’re talking about here. When you are trusting in Jesus Christ, you **can** get your hopes up. And here’s why: “(H)ope

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." God has already poured out His love into your heart. You already know that you are forgiven. You believe that God has declared peace between you and Him. You believe that God is using your troubles for your good. These are things that are already in your heart. And so yes, you **can** get your hopes up, because those who trust in Jesus Christ will never be disappointed. Amen.