**Romans sermon series 1**

**25th February 2024** 10.30am Holy Communion St Mary Magdalene’s, Waltham

1. **Peace**

Peace and Hope Romans 5 v1-5

5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we[b] boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

***Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.***

Let’s pray

Prince of Peace, I stand before you with a heart burdened and restless.

Grant me the inner peace that surpasses all understanding.

Calm the storms within me and fill me with the assurance of your presence. Help me to give anxieties over to you and to trust in your perfect peace.

Let all of me be an instrument of your peace in the world. So that wherever I go,

if I encounter hate, let me to be a source of love.

If I am wronged by others, let me forgive those who have wronged me.

Where I encounter doubt, let me inspire faith in others.

And where I find sadness and despair, let me be a source of joy and hope, like a single light illuminating a dark room.

Give me the strength to console others, more than I want to be consoled myself;

I want to understand more than I desire to be understood; and to love, more than I desire to be loved.

For it’s in giving that we receive and in forgiving that we are forgiven.

Only by overcoming the ego, the “big me”, “the self”, are we born to eternal life.

Loving God, I lift the relationships in my life that are filled with tension and discord to You. Pour out your peace on those involved, softening hearts and fostering understanding. May your love guide our words and actions, bringing reconciliation and harmony. Grant us the wisdom to forgive and the humility to seek peace.

Almighty God, I pray for peace in our world, especially where there is conflict and strife at this time. Bring an end to violence and injustice. Inspire leaders to work towards the well-being of all people. May your love and compassion prevail, uniting nations in a common pursuit of peace. Let your kingdom of peace reign on earth as it is in heaven.

Gracious Lord, in times of uncertainty and fear, I seek your peace that transcends circumstances. Help me to trust in your plan and find security in your promises. Quiet my anxious thoughts and fill my heart with your peace that guards my mind and soul. I surrender my worries to you, knowing that you are in control.

Comforting God, in times of grief and loss, I long for your peace that surpasses sorrow. Wrap your arms around me and those who mourn, bringing solace to our hearts. May your peace reign during pain, reminding us of the hope we have in you. Grant us the strength to endure, knowing you are our refuge and strength.

Now in a moment of quiet we give to you those people, places and issues that are on our hearts and minds today….

Lord, send us the gift of peace…

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

This sermon is the 4th in a series based on Dr Andrew Ollerton’s book entitled ***Romans - a letter that makes sense of life***. Andrew works with Bible Society and he also developed The Bible Course, a guide to the Bible which some of you may be familiar with.

So… Paul’s letter to the Romans…,

It is the early days of the Christian church… Paul is writing to small house churches in Rome that are scattered, meeting in secret, and often persecuted. The churches were made up of gentiles (who had worshipped idols), and Jewish converts (who would have lived under the law & rituals of Judaism). Rich and poor, slaves and free, a whole mix of people drawn together through the revelation of Jesus Christ. And they needed to know how to understand their new faith and how to live together – hence the letter.

Paul's letter is about the good news, the gospel of Jesus.

God has found a way, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, to justify the ungodly sinners. That is where we come in folks!

Yes all of us, because we are the ungodly sinners.

As Paul has told us, "There is none righteous, no, not one," (Romans 3:10b KJV).

Andrew Ollerton uses this image of a mountain to illustrate the journey through Romans… SLIDE

In the mountain analogy I couldn’t help but think of John Bunyan’s book **Pilgrim’s progress** – the weight on Pilgrim’s back getting heavier and heavier… The burden of sin and life – growing and growing as he journeys up a mountain… The sort of struggles we humans can't seem to shake .. We all get weighed down with the stuff of life..

If you have been following us on the Romans journey - it all sounds a bit like chapters 1 to 3 of Romans - the undeniable presence of sin in us all; the crushing weight of the Old Testament law; the self-righteousness amongst the Jews – the established church.

In Romans 1 to 3 we hear that all humanity has a sin problem - Jews and Gentiles alike (1:18-3:20)

and in Romans 4 we are told that God has given us a grace solution: and we are told that God’s grace comes through faith, not through works and good

Coincidentally - is today’s set lectionary reading is Romans 4:13-25 not Romans 5 .. amazing! The story so far…

Paul uses Abraham as a human example of how to live in the right relationship with God. The fulfilment of God's promise is through Abraham's faith and trust in God … and not because of something he did.

Paul then tells us that salvation comes through justification by faith,

***"He was delivered over to death for our sin, and was raised to life for our justification,"*** (Romans 4:25 NIV). Jesus died for our sins then… and now. You are justified by faith.

 … ok…. Yes but… what does that mean? .. do you ever think that? Hear someone up here preaching away and think to yourself… and? …. So what?

Justification by faith …. It is a bit theological and highbrow for me… What does it mean for me? Today?

Helpfully in Romans 5 Paul gives us some so whats… and the route on up the mountain..

Paul tells us that the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus - gives us Peace and freedom and life (chap 5-8)

1. Peace with God and the hope of glory (5:1-21)

2. Freedom from sin and law, bondage now to righteousness (6:1-7:25)

3. Life eternal in the Spirit, so much more than our present suffering (8:1-39)

It is the first of these Peace with God and the hope of Glory that is today’s theme - Freedom is next week and Hope the week after – so you will just have to wait, be patient and journey with us ….. on up that mountain..

Today in Chapter 5 Paul is giving us a place to rest on our journey up the mountain – a chance to catch our breath, to reflect on where we have come from and to take in the view ahead..

The opening word of chapter 5 is **"Therefore..."**

Paul is coming to some conclusions and now there is a change in tone and content - it is almost as if he has been racing along trying to get us to this waypoint on the journey up the mountain.. .

All of those problems, all of those struggles, all of that condemnation Paul talked about at the beginning of Romans - God has a way to deal with it all. Salvation - that's what Sue talked about last week.

When we have faith in Jesus, God credits Christ's righteousness to us, so that when we stand before God, He "justifies" us (declares us right with Him). By dying on the cross Jesus atoned for our sins.

We are Justified through the death of Jesus - Romans 5:6-8

***For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die.***

***But God shows his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

***But God shows his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*** – does that sound familiar to you? that is part of the confession we use in our benefice booklet – straight out of Romans 5

​"Therefore" . . Chapter 5 is a turning point in Romans

"We don't need to dwell on the bad news any longer because there's so much good news to share!"

Paul says by being justified, you will have peace with God. You are a Christian. That means you are in the family, you belong to the family of God. Gods loves you.

All the conflict between you; and God is ended; you are at peace with him. You have been reconciled with God. Made right with God.. Justified.

I think there is something in all of us that instinctively fears God.

I remember how at school assembly I thought of God was like a heavenly policeman, always watching me, the stern and forbidding judge, ready to correct me and straighten me out when I did wrong – the minister kept reminding us that we were all sinners and were damned.

But the good news is that having been justified by faith, we lose our fear of God.

Because we are at peace with God we also lose our fear of death. We are not afraid of what lies beyond. You know it will be glory not judgment.

When you have peace with God, you can deal with the attacks of doubt and fear you may have.

I am sure there are some who think that once you've been a Christian for a while you reach a point when you never again have any doubts. But you never get there. I know some folk think that those of us who stand up here never have any doubts about our relationship with God. I can tell you here and now, that is not true. God can help us deal with those moments.

Salvation has nothing to do with what we are like, but with Jesus, and what he has done for us. You have been justified by faith.

If you have peace with God, you have an answer to your own conscience when you sin. I know that many young Christians, early on in their relationship with God, who think that they are never going to sin again. Sin seems to them to be an impossible thing. But sooner or later they will be back doing some of those things. Old habits will reassert themselves; old ways of thinking will return. Friends and peer pressure will want them to follow a different path… Perhaps they won’t go back to all that they did before, but they will go back to some things and try new things – I certainly did. They will sin again. We all do! You are justified by faith, God still loves you!.

Do you have peace with God? You have been justified by faith.

Just before Communion we will share the peace

In our usual service books we say

***Peace to you from God who is our father***

***Peace from Jesus Christ who is our peace***

***Peace from the Holy Spirit who gives us life***

***The peace of the triune God be always with you***

Then – we shake hands – we say peace be with you – what do we mean? And do we mean it? – we say the peace of the Lord be always with you .

We are asking God to be at peace with ourselves and with each other – how can we be at peace with God if we are not at peace with each other? So we need to mean it when we shake hands and look each other in the eye – it is not a token gesture..

You may hear the Hebrew word ***Shalom*** used instead of the word peace – Shalom - it’s literal meaning is made whole, made right, complete, … justified…

When we share the peace, we want things to me made right – justified - We have peace with each other and then meet with God.

Romans 5 tells us now that we are justified by faith and we also have access to the grace of God …

***...through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand.*** (Romans 5:2a NIV)

By God’s grace, we can stand strong in the middle of life’s pressures and problems and trials and difficulties.

On facebook I love these simple messages (SLIDE) – ***God never promised the absence of storms in our life, but he does promise to walk with us through them… faith does not mean trusting God to stop the storm but trusting him to strengthen us as we walk through the storm –***

 Jesus is with us on the boat in the stormy seas of life – that is God’s grace…our anchor is our faith in Jesus.

What God has done for us in Jesus should inspire us to be at peace with each other and to love one another.

So once we are at peace and reconciled with God we have access to God’s grace.

Then Paul tells us we can now finally rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2b NIV)

**don’t worry be happy! Rejoice!**

We can look forward to something beyond all this…… Joy - We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

It may feel tough for us here today in 2024. For some people it is very tough. There are some Christians in the world today who have nothing of the freedom and the joy of relationships that you and I experience together here in Waltham.

They are persecuted, they are in danger, they wake up every morning with the expectation that they are going to have to live under oppression, and perhaps even lose their life just because they call themselves a Christian.

Life may be cold and hard, it may be filled with pain and sorrow, but the promise to all who are justified by faith is that there is something, a glory beyond death that is certain. Freedom and Hope – and these are the next 2 topics in the sermon series…

I found this book on the shelf at café church last week; - the author is a guy called Charles Handy – he is a professor of business – he is one of the great management theorists - his book ***understanding organizations*** was one of the main textbooks on my degree course at the University of Strathclyde business school some 40 years ago! – what I did not know was that he also occasionally writes from a personal, theological and philosophical perspective – so imagine my surprise at finding his book here in church and the attention grabbing title ..

– the book is called ***waiting for the mountain to move and other reflections on life*** .. I haven’t read it all yet but I want to read a short extract… it spoke volumes about today’s topic – I have no idea why I went over to look at the bookshelf .. another affirmation that God is guiding me on my own journey up the mountain..

Prayer

I am going to end with the words of a Celtic blessing from the Iona community

Deep peace of the running waves to you

Deep peace of the flowing air to you

Deep peace of the quiet air to you

Deep peace of the shining stars to you

Deep peace of the Son of peace to you

Shalom