Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God. 3Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, 4and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. 5And hope will not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.

This is the perfect text for this Sunday. I say that for two reasons. First, it is the Lent season where we take a closer look at what it is that Jesus has done for us. What he has done is amazing and awesome and this text is one of the best for getting the wonder of Jesus before us.

Second, this Sunday I am going to use this text as a precursor to the things that will be. In other words, I will use this text to speak to you about the changes that are indeed coming for you as a congregation. After the Council meeting on Sunday night, Raetta and I will be announcing to you our retirement plans, yep, we will present you with a specific date that says, “This is it!” I have served you for 42 years, and though I love the ministry of my Lord and Savior, the truth of the matter is that it is time to step down and take on a new chapter in life. Most of you know that chapter began when my daughter married and then, that second chapter happened when my granddaughter was born. Raetta and I very much, want to be a part of the life of that granddaughter and however many grandkids Matthew and Kayla are blessed with. We will go to be with them to help and assist in the raising of this child.

But that means changes for you. Oh, I know it means changes for me, but I am braced for that and in truth I look forward to that. Honestly, it will be a relief not to carry the burden of your souls on my shoulders. That’s what I’ve been doing these past 42 years. Hebrews 13:17 is a passage of God’s Word that speaks to what it is that God’s called servants in the ministry do. We are told: **“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will give an account.”** I have taken that truth of God’s Word to heart. I have had care and concern for your souls always aware that I will give answer to my God and Lord should any soul be lost because of my misuse of the means of the public ministry. I have never consider this load a burden, but I must confess that as the years have gone by, that load seems to be getting heavier and heavier. In other words, the time is soon upon us when we will no longer be Pastor and members walking together in the service of the Lord.

What changes will you face? You will have a vacancy Pastor to begin. Your District President will meet with you and you will begin the process of extending a call to your next Pastor. You will have to assess your church, your own standing, your own participation, your own viewpoint of your faith. You will have to determine if you are going to remain a single independent congregation or if you will join together with another congregation in a dual ministry, a dual parish type of setting. I can tell you this. If you want to remain independent and such, many of you are going to have to make a change. You will need to be in church. You will need to support your church. You will need to be involved and interested in what is going on here at St. Paul. You will need to encourage one another, help one another and let me emphasize this again: Be involved! Not just with your presence but also with your prayers, your joy, and your offerings to the Lord. Because churches don’t survive magically. Churches survive because the people love the Lord. Because its members rally to the wonder of Jesus. Because you grasp and understand the importance of God’s message of Jesus not only for yourselves, but for the communities around you.

So, now that we have laid this out for you, let’s remind ourselves of just what we have in Jesus. Our theme will be: **PEACE WITH GOD!**

Please note the very first words of our text. They are awesome! We are told in verse 1: **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** There are a few important words laid out here. The first is: **“therefore!”** That therefore refers back to all that the holy writer has already said. Already a message of hope, wonder, joy and salvation has been laid out. Already in chapter 1 you heard about the **“the power of the gospel for all who believe.”** From there the message resonates with the fact that the gospel is the fulfillment of God’s glory and truth in Jesus. How Jesus came to be holy and perfect under the law and then went to the cross to pay for our sins. Oh, yes, the first 4 chapters of Romans sets up the power of this 5th chapter we are in.

Therefore what? **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith.”** Here already is the full joy and awe of the gospel message of Jesus. There is this thing called sin. It has been devastating to the world and the souls of men. We went from being humankind who walked in perfect harmony and understanding of God to people who by nature are now inclined to evil and enemies of God. From the moment sin entered the world, we lost our status before God and the horror and weight of eternal damnation came crashing upon us. But enter the wonder of Jesus. Jesus again, lived the perfect life we could not. Jesus offered himself as our payment before his heavenly Father. Here is the fact, because of Jesus **“we have been justified by faith.”**

What a beautiful and deeply revealing word we have here. We are justified. In truth this word is a statement, a declaration of the Lord God. On the basis of what Jesus has done, we have been pronounced innocent, free of all charges and the weight of sin. We have been clothed with the robe of Christ righteousness so that God no longer sees us with the scars and wounds of sin, but rather only with the perfection and holiness of Jesus. Yes, we are guilty, guilty of deep and atrocious sins before our God. Guilty of ignoring Him, disobeying Him, rebelling against Him and trashing His holiness on a daily basis. But because of the death of Jesus and his sacrifice, God our Father will declare us forgiven. He will tell us He sees no guilt and sin in our lives because He will look at us through the eyes of Jesus. In Jesus we are justified.

Grasp the wonder of this truth. In Jesus we are declared innocent, cleansed of all sin. In Jesus. That is the force of the phrase “by faith.” “**We have been justified by faith!”** By faith means something specific. It means we believe Jesus to be Lord and Christ. He is the Lord because he is true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity. He is fully God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, sharing all the attributes of the nature of God. He is the One to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given. He is the one to whom God the Father has entrusted all judgment. And Jesus will judge you.

In John 8 there are a number of passages where Jesus makes his role clear in all that will be. In verses 23-24 of that chapter, Jesus speaking with the Pharisees and Jewish rulers who refused to believe in him said, **“You are from below,” he told them. “I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world. 24That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am the one, you will die in your sins.”** Your faith needs to be in Jesus. That he is the Lord. That he rules over all things, judges all things, declares the right and wrong in all things. Again, as I said a few sermons ago, “If your attitude is that Jesus is going to have to play second fiddle to the sins you want to live in, you will be in for a surprise!” To believe in Jesus, by faith in Jesus, means something.

It also means that you grasp he is the Christ. Trust in Him. Trust that His sacrifice has atoned for your sins. Turn to him and repent, seek his forgiveness, stop the sin, cling to his wonder, and you will find that Jesus is kind, compassionate and gracious in every way. He will and does forgiven. Use that wonder of forgiveness as your strength and core. Because Jesus so loves me, because Jesus completely forgives me, because I have been made a child of God and an heir of eternal life, I will hear and follow Jesus. I will cling to his word. I will struggle against sin and its temptations. I will make the honor of the Lord the way I want to be and live. All because I grasp that Jesus is the Christ and by faith I know that the Father has declared me innocent, a child of heaven, holy and perfect in my Savior Jesus!

Now perhaps we are ready to go on to what our verses continue to say to us. **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** We have peace with God. This is not some sort of worldly peace, some sort of earthly treatise where you don’t attack me and I won’t attack you. This is not some sort of fairy tale “happy ever after gig” that is going to erupt upon our life. This is peace with God. You and the Lord God are at peace!

There is such joy in just grasping and basking in these words. Peace! Peace with God! Is there any better peace to have? Here is this all powerful, all-knowing, you won’t get anything past Him God who could crush us with but a thought, and yet because of Jesus, He loves us, forgives us and then promises to use his wonder and marvel to guide us in our lives of joy and service to Him. Peace! In the courtroom of God I stand crumpled, dirty, shamed, and burdened with guilt. There is no doubt in this! I am totally worthless before the majesty of the Holy God. I am like bug splatter compared to just the beauty of his bejeweled sandals. I deserve condemnation. And God the Father, in Jesus, says, “Peace. You are forgiven. You are my child, an heir of eternal life. Wear my robes and you will have the beauty of my eternity upon you. I will give you a mansion to dwell in where all your needs and even more will be met. You will inherit my kingdom of Peace.” None of this because we have earned it, but because the Lord gives it to us in Jesus.

How that peace of God impacts my life. Now turn your attention to the rest of the words of our section, words that must first grasp justified and peace by faith in Jesus. We hear: **2Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God. 3Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, 4and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. 5And hope will not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.**

Follow what is said. Because of Jesus we have access to this grace of God, This forgiveness, and peace is ours in every way because the Father has so decreed it all in Jesus, by Jesus. This grace that we stand in, this grace causes us then to rejoice. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And don’t miss that word “confidently!” Here is how I have always understood this. There is this thing called “the glory of God.” Think of everything good, wonderful, awesome, fulfilling, and on and on. All of this is found in God and his glory. You and I, because of Jesus inherit this. This glory, we will share in! God will open his wonder and marvel, his total awesomeness up to us. We will become heirs, inheritors of God’s glory and grace! We will be surrounded and impacted by this glory of God, shared with us, forever! Can we even truly fathom this wonder? I hope you can! You will benefit if you can just catch even a shiny sparkle of the wonder of God and how it will be ours in his eternal kingdom. Then you begin to grasp the depth of joy spoken of here.

Yet there is more. These next words I fear many of us have never contemplated and grasped for the total marvel they are. Listen up, verses 3-5, **3Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, 4and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. 5And hope will not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.**

Tell me you get this. We are told that because of Jesus we can rejoice in our sufferings. Fact is, as God’s children living in this world, it will be a life filled with strife, temptations, turmoil, persecutions, troubles and a kind of “mud hole” of horrors. That is this world of sin. We, in Jesus, will be different. We face sufferings with joy. Why? Because we trust in God. We know God will use these things to strengthen us, grant us endurance, produce a tested character and in that character come out with even more hope in the wonder of God! Did you ever hear of this awe? This joy that says our difficult lives, because of Jesus, produce patience and character and all the more the hope of God’s goodness in our lives! Please, take this section of God’s Word home and think long and hard on the force of just these verses as we are informed that in Jesus, because of Jesus we are going to rejoice in our sufferings. And when you become overcome with awe at the total wonder of that truth of God then start once again thinking of the peace we have in Jesus. All of this because we are justified in Jesus! This is our Christian faith. Amen.