

Dear friends in our Savior,

This weekend around our country we are celebrating peace. Technically, we are honoring those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our country. But the sacrifice that these soldiers made helped to bring about the peace that we enjoy in America. While certainly that doesn't mean that there are no problems, we do enjoy a peace of not having war in our cities. We don't have soldiers fighting through our streets and buildings being torn apart with warfare. We don't have to fear going to the store or the movies because of firefights that might break out. We live in a land of peace. This weekend we give thanks to God for the peace that God has brought to us through the soldiers who defend our land and the many blessings that go along with it.

While we thank God for the physical peace which he brings in our land and honor those through whom he brought it, we also have the opportunity today to consider the spiritual peace which our triune God brings to us. As we celebrate the mystery of a triune—three in one—God, we worship him for the blessings which he brings to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our triune God works in unity with each other to bring us the blessing of peace with God, which brings us the blessings of hope and joy as we travel toward our eternity with him. As we honor our soldiers for their sacrifice, we honor our God for **Peace through the Ultimate Sacrifice**.

Romans 5:1-5 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we 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 rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

Our text starts out with, *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith.”* In the previous chapters, Paul has already established God's declaration to the world: *“You are not guilty of your sins.”* This is the doctrine of justification. This proclamation of innocence becomes ours through faith—by trusting in Jesus as our Savior from sin. It was Jesus' life, death and resurrection that made this declaration possible. In the verse just prior to our text, Paul had proclaimed the wonderful statement: *“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”* Because of the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross for our sins, His rising from the dead was God's proclamation to the world that all sins are forgiven through Jesus. Faith in him takes these blessings which God declares for the world and makes them ours personally. This righteous declaration from God has an effect on our lives when we believe it in faith. It affects us. It changes us. It blesses us.

Paul tells us how that affects us. Because of this declaration, we now have peace with God in heaven. Peace is a tough word in our world today. While we do not face the hostility of an invading army, there are shootings in our city and land daily. There are bombs that are set at events like the Boston Marathon. This week we heard about the devastation with the tornadoes in Oklahoma and Texas. The peace of our land seems to be shallow or fleeting at best. But not so the peace that Paul talks about that is ours with God in heaven. This peace is not just a subjective feeling or a false peace that comes from ignoring reality and living in a dream world. Because of God's declaration, we have a brand new relationship with him. We are no longer opposing him as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. Think back to their lack of peace with God. The second that they had sinned by eating the fruit from the tree, their peace with God was shattered. In its place was fear and hostility. They felt the guilt of their sin and they ran away from God. They were afraid of God and what he would do because of their sin. They hid from him. They had no peace with God.

Think of a child who does wrong during the day and is told by mom, *“Just wait until your father gets home.”* There is no peace for that afternoon as the child waits in dread for dad's arrival home from work. The fear and anxiety of not knowing how dad is going to react can be overwhelming. Perhaps what brings the most fear if you are that child is that you know exactly how dad is going to react and you know it is not going to be good! Adam and Eve knew exactly what would happen to them. God had clearly told them, *“When you eat of it, you will surely die.”* We know that fear. When we sin, we fear God because we know exactly what we deserve for that sin. Fear grips us when we realize that we have done again what we promised we would not do. Fear grips us when we realize how much our sin hurt someone we loved. Fear grips us when we consider having to stand before God to admit that we sinned knowing God's judgment of death is to be proclaimed on us.

God's declaration of justification brings such peace to our hearts. He declared the state of hostility that existed between you and him because of your sin to be over. The empty tomb of Jesus shouts, *“You are forgiven. You are not guilty of your sins.”* Our peace is that in Jesus, we know exactly what God is going to say about our sin. *“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7).”* *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Ps. 103:12)”* *“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. (2 Cor 5:19)”*

This is grace—God’s undeserved love for us in Jesus. This is the grace in which we now stand as God’s people. That means God’s grace is all around us. We are forgiven at all times. This is not a forgiveness where you pile up sins for a while and then forgiveness comes and you are ok. There is not a time that we are not forgiven. You are living inside the forgiveness of sins. This is the peace that you have with the almighty God in heaven above. It’s not a peace that comes from inside of you. It is a peace which comes from outside of you and is not dependent upon you in any way. It is the triune God’s gift to you—poured out on you through the Holy Spirit, won through Jesus and gifted by your Father in heaven. Instead of hostility and fear and anxiety, God grants you a tranquil peace certain that all of your sins are fully and freely forgiven.

This peace now brings to you more blessings in Christ. Through Jesus, you now have unhampered access to the Father. Now you can approach him with confidence concerning any problem that you have. You have the peace of knowing his love and knowing that he will not reject you. If you have sinned, you can approach him with the confidence of forgiveness through Jesus. If you are in trouble, you can approach him with the certainty of his love and willingness to help. We are not afraid now to stand before God. We know his love. We know the barrier that existed because of our sin has been removed and torn down. We know the invitation of our Father to cast our cares and anxieties on him and know he will answer our prayers according to his will. We are free to come before His throne of grace with any and every petition.

This peace also gives us hope and certainty for the future. We have a problem with hope because our hopes have been dashed so often. We had our dreams or hopes for the way things would go in our lives and they didn’t turn out that way. We have put our hope in someone or something only to be let down completely. But the problem isn’t hope. The problem is the object of our hope. Hope that is misplaced can leave us in the lurch. But Christian hope does not disappoint because it is well placed. Our Christian hope is reliable because the one in whom it trusts—our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is trustworthy and reliable. Our hope in eternal life with God is not unfounded optimism. It is a blessed assurance of our future destiny and is based on the Father’s love displayed through Jesus and poured out by the Holy Spirit. Hope makes you ashamed when it doesn’t come true. The hope that we have in Christ will never make us ashamed it is firmly placed in God.

Now we have a certain hope for the future. The peace we have with God, the access we have through Jesus, and the hope that the Spirit brings through faith gives us a joy that is only a foretaste of the unspeakably greater joy of sharing in the glories of heaven. We have this hope as the anchor of our soul, firm and secure.

Now we can rejoice, not only in hope but even in the midst of our sufferings. Knowing God’s deep love and care for us, having the peace of sins forgiven and the certainty of life waiting for us, gives us a different perspective on the sufferings that we endure. Now we are able to see God’s love in them. We come to trust that God has a purpose in our sufferings and will bring us good things through them. The Greek word for “sufferings” has the meaning of pressure. We all have things pressing down on us. We all feel the pressures that weigh on us every day. Yet as God’s people, rather than grumbling and complaining about them, we can rejoice, even boast, in them because we trust God uses them for our good. God uses sufferings as a means for drawing believers to himself and working perseverance in them. God uses our sufferings to draw us back to his word. Think of the times that we most readily grab our Bibles. Isn’t it the times when things are pressing on us the most? Then we pick up our Bibles and there God strengthens us with his peace, reminds us of the access that we have with him and assures us of the hope that is ours. God’s word gives us the courage to live through the pressures we face without discouragement or weakening. This suffering produces perseverance—the ability to bear up under adversity. This ability to bear up under pressure produces character. It makes us like a battle tested soldier, one who has been through the battle and come out the other side even stronger. And this character produces hope. It shows us that God is real, that he really does help and that he really will keep his promises. This hope then gives us even more confidence in the salvation that awaits.

Think of it this way. If a piece of coal could talk, it might tell you that it does not like the earth pressing in on it. It might tell you that the pressure of all the rocks is too much for it and that the heat that accompanies this makes it very uncomfortable. But this is how a piece of coal becomes a beautiful diamond. You are that piece of coal, under the pressures of life, feeling the heat of the problems and difficulties around you. Yet God is working through that to transform you into a beautiful diamond that shines for his kingdom. God promises that despite those pressures, the Holy Spirit is still being poured out on you through his word to remind you of God’s love and care. Suffering knocks away all those pillars that we might build our hope on: our skill, our money, our determination, technology, health care, government, economy and so on. Suffering gets us to the point where only Christ is left. He is the solid rock and foundation upon which we stand. We can bear up patiently and persevere through suffering because we stand on Christ and we know that he will not crumble.

All these blessings are brought to you by your triune God in heaven. All of them stem from that peace that is yours through him alone. This weekend, take time to remember and honor those whom God has used to bring us the peace that we enjoy in this land of America. It truly is a blessing to us from God in heaven, brought to us by those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to achieve and preserve it. Yet let it remind you of the greater peace that you have from one who truly made the ultimate sacrifice—your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As you treasure this gift, give praise to the one who made it all possible for you—our triune God working in unity for our salvation, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.