

May 26, 2013

Romans 5: 1 – 5

¹By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus.

²And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

³There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, ⁴and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next.

⁵In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

John 16: 12 – 15

¹²I still have many things to tell you, but you can't handle them now.

¹³But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won't draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said.

¹⁴He will honor me; he will take from me and deliver it to you.

¹⁵Everything the Father has is also mine. That is why I've said, 'He takes from me and delivers to you.'

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon

A few weeks ago, when Sharon mentioned that I was preaching today, she also stated that it was Confirmation Sunday and so she asked if I could keep my sermon on the shorter side. I responded to her with "You never have to worry about that with me!" Then this past week I noticed that we were singing "How Great Thou Art," and I told someone that I was going to stand up here and preach Fire and Brimstone from the pulpit! No I not.

I was reading an article on the internet, where I do most of my research and I came across the following; in a letter to philosopher Bertrand Russell, author Joseph Conrad lamented the following: "I have never been able to find in any man's book or in any man's talk anything convincing enough to stand up for a moment against my defeated sense of fatality governing this man-inhabited world"

Further down in the same article was the following; on the other hand, Gloria Steinem confidently hoped that by the year 2,000 men and women would raise their children to believe in human potential, not in God.

These contradicting viewpoints cannot be true at the same time, either we have faith in humans or we don't, but we can't have both faith in them and no faith in them. Yet, there is another answer and that is that as humans we build a faith in God, which will enable us to build a new world.

In today's reading from Romans we hear Paul talk about our faith, much like one would talk about the forging of steel. "troubles can develop passionate patience in us, ⁴and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next."

Today is confirmation and as such we welcome new members to our community of faith. Confirmation is one of the building blocks of a strong and lasting faith.

Like anything else our faith must be built on a strong foundation and as with anything that is constructed, there are essential parts that make up our faith and if one of those essential parts is missing, just as when we deal with shoddy construction, what can happen to our faith?

A strong foundation of faith does not just happen overnight; worthy foundations take work, time, patience, humility, knowledge and confidence.

Last week Sharon talked about baptism and about how traditionally when one was baptized they were given their Christian name, they were named; named as a part of a larger community. In baptism the foundation of our faith is laid and it is built upon as we enter into a community of faith to be nurtured as children in Sunday school. This continues as we grow and become more involved in community. As we are confirmed our faith grows stronger and that foundation is built upon again.

We have all heard of the tragedy that occurred in Oklahoma this past week. According to CNN only around 2 % of people have basements in Moore, Oklahoma the town hit by last week's tornado. Many are under the false assumption that you cannot have a basement because the water table is too high and the soil has too much clay. The strength to withstand those violent forces of nature then becomes even more dependent on the strength of a foundation, how thick was that pad and how far those footings placed into the ground. These questions will determine how well a house on a foundation will withstand violent weather.

I remember a while back I thought I might go looking for a house to buy and I remember seeing a number of them with cracks along the corners of walls and along where the walls meet the ceiling and I thought, "WOW" these walls and ceilings are in bad shape. In talking to a friend of mine he pointed out that these cracks have little to do with the walls, it is the foundation. We a weak or compromised foundation, it affects the entire structure.

Those houses, much like our faith, need to be built on a deep foundation to weather all of those storms in life.

Confirmation is just one of the building blocks of a firm and deep foundation that will allow us to weather those storms.

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus tells the disciples that he has more to tell them, but they were not ready to hear it. In our lives a faith that is built upon a firm foundation will allow us to face those times when, without it, we might not be ready to face those times of fear, anxiety and stress in our lives and the lives of those around us.

As we grow and mature in our faith we continue to strengthen our faith by being a part of a faith community and we are called and challenged to continue to build a strong faith as we worship together, we learn together and we bring our faith back out into the world.

If we go back to Oklahoma, the first response to the tragedy was from communities of faith with the Salvation Army setting up kitchens preparing to feed upwards of 2500 people/day. Other faith communities raised money to help feed and clothe those who lost everything. Individuals of faith have come together across to help the victims. ` Abdur-Rahman Taleb, the director of youth services at the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City, focused on the human response to Monday's tornado. "I find it amazing how people will come together across their differences for a common goal," Taleb said. "The amount of people who came forward from the different faith communities to help those in need, regardless of their beliefs, is extraordinary."

On this confirmation Sunday we come together to continue to build a strong faith in God, a faith that will last us throughout our entire lives, a faith that will enable us together to face those storms of life. **AMEN**