

## **Romans 5**

*New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)*

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

## **John 16**

*New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)*

<sup>12</sup> 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

'I still have many things to say to you,  
but you cannot bear them now"

on Trinity Sunday

Some of you may still be hoping for an explanation  
of how the Holy Trinity is made up and the way it operates  
but as I've said many times, it's a Divine mystery

I'm still trying to work out how the Holy Spirit works  
A week after Pentecost  
I'm not even going to try and explain the Trinity

- a) because we don't need to – we just need to trust, and
- b) because there may well be things about it we cannot bear, things too awesome to know

this has been - as Jimmy Greaves used to say  
"a funny old week"

on the one hand, I'm still really buoyed-up by our Away-Day  
and I'm sorry for the delay,  
but I do hope, very soon, to have a booklet for every member  
to see the outcomes of our Lent Course and Away-Day  
which I'm sure will encourage and inspire you

but then - as I say – it's been one of those weeks  
whenever you take one step forward  
the devil tries to push you back

and sure enough, he's been stirring up one or two people  
to throw teddies out of prams since that weekend

we should take comfort from this  
as Paul says to the Romans

*we boast in our sufferings,  
knowing that suffering produces endurance,  
endurance produces character,  
and character produces hope*

We also boast in our sufferings  
Because as a wise old Christian once said  
The devil will only be stirred into action when he feels threatened

If we were posing no threat, he wouldn't bother us  
So we must be doing something right!

But three things have happened this week  
which bring me hope and encouragement

on Wednesday,  
our deanery chapter met at St Peter's  
and it's down to the host to start the meeting  
with a time of worship, a thought, and a prayer

I shared my personal daily prayer notes with them  
I'm following Jeff Lucas (recommend daily notes)

Now to be honest, I'm so used to this awesome God of ours  
producing exactly what we need when we need it  
that I wasn't surprised at all by what he had to say

at the moment Jeff's going through the book of Daniel  
and we've reached the point  
where Nebuchadnezzar has a dream  
which his advisors can't interpret

so the king throws a tantrum  
(see even Kings throw teddies out of the prams)  
and he orders all wise men to be put to the sword

so Daniel and his men do a runner and hide  
and this is what Jeff Lucas has to say...  
(read)

John begins this morning's gospel reading  
With Jesus saying  
<sup>12</sup> 'I still have many things to say to you,  
but you cannot bear them now.  
And when you precede that with verse one of this chapter  
it makes all this even scarier  
*'I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling.*  
<sup>2</sup> *They will put you out of the synagogues.*  
*Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you*  
*will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.*

And yet here Jesus is now telling them  
*I still have many things to say to you,*  
*but you cannot bear them now.*  
Nice!

In light of events in Woolwich this week,  
That 2<sup>nd</sup> verse makes me shudder

As those murderers hacked Drummer Lee Rigby to death  
They no doubt would have been crying "Allahu Akbar"  
Meaning "God is great"

These angry, impressionable young men  
are being brainwashed into believing  
that they're doing God a favour  
and gaining themselves a place in Paradise

folks – God doesn't need any favours from us!  
He's more than capable of looking after Himself  
And I don't believe for one moment  
such brutal atrocities will be rewarded with a place in Paradise

The point Jeff Lucas was making on Wednesday  
Is that Jesus warned us such things would happen  
And Jesus is saying just that today  
"there may be trouble ahead!"  
we have been warned!

But on the positive side – Jesus knows – stick with Him!

the other thing that happened this week  
was at our CLIFF meeting on Thursday morning  
CLIFF stands for Christian leaders in Friendly Fellowship  
And again, it's up to the host to start the meeting  
with a time of worship, a thought or prayer

Our host was very open and honest  
in sharing some of the difficulties he is experiencing  
in his church at the moment

And it soon became apparent  
from the outpouring of grievances and concerns  
That many church leaders are suffering the same

I was able to remind them all of this weekend's readings  
And the twofold blessings they bring  
First from Paul, and secondly from Jesus

Paul reminds the church in Rome  
*That we boast in our sufferings,  
knowing that suffering produces endurance,  
4 and endurance produces character,  
and character produces hope,  
5 and hope does not disappoint us,  
because God's love has been poured into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit*

so I'd like to try and unwrap that a little this morning  
I know some people would challenge that first line for starters  
suffering produces endurance?  
Yeah right!

I'm quite sure some people – at first sign of suffering  
Would pack it in, throw in the towel,  
When the going gets tough, they throw teddy out the pram  
wave the white flag and skedaddle!

Suffering only produces endurance with the tough guys  
OR – people filled by the Holy Spirit

Endurance produces character – well that's pretty true  
But the kind of character may depend  
on what kind of person they were  
before the endurance became necessary!

I can think of a few people  
For whom the description "a bit of a Character"  
Is definitely not meant as a compliment!

Question one this morning  
Do you – at the first sign of trouble – wave the white flag?  
And if the answer's "no" – do you bear your suffering with a smile  
Or do you turn into "a bit of a Character"?

I ask that question now,  
because the next bit depends on your answer  
character produces hope,

well now  
if you've already admitted to being "a bit of a Character"  
(in the negative sense of the word)  
what hope do you have?

More to the point,  
what hope do you bring to the people around you?

Mind – there are some "right characters" around  
who bring joy to the world

Joan's niece and her husband have been on holiday this week  
And visited a "Gnome Sanctuary"  
You've got to be a bit of a character to open one of them!  
And I dare say the kind of character who makes people laugh  
And lifts their spirits

And what about this next bit  
"Hope does not disappoint us"  
oh yes it does!!!!

I once hoped to be Sunderland's goalkeeper  
But it never happened  
I once hoped to score the winning run or take the final wicket  
To win the ashes off the Aussies  
But it never happened

When I first became a Christian  
I hoped to be the next Graham Kendrick

But God had other plans for me

Question two this morning  
What are your hopes and dreams?  
And have they ever disappointed you?

If the answer's "yes" then it's probably because  
they're not *God's* hopes and dreams for you!

that's the point Paul is making to the Romans  
And it's all made perfectly clear  
With his last words

*hope does not disappoint us,  
because God's love has been poured into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit*

none of the above will work  
without God's Holy Spirit working in us

and that poses the third  
and most important question of this sermon

has God's love has been poured into your heart  
through the Holy Spirit?

Will you boast in your sufferings,  
knowing that such suffering produces endurance?

Will that endurance produce character?

And is that character the kind that produces hope?  
Not just for you, but for the people around you?

Well – let's turn now to our Gospel reading this morning  
And to the words of Jesus

Because this is the third thing that brought me hope this week

On Wednesday I was given the words our chapter needed to hear  
And on Thursday those same words comforted church leaders  
of many denominations from all around our town

it comforted us - not that we would suffer for the gospel  
but that Jesus already knew that  
and that He warned and prepared His disciples

it comforted us to know - that God knows all things  
that He is in control  
that He is sovereign Lord over all creation

it comforted us to know  
that He was right there among us on Wednesday  
and on Thursday - in our suffering

and above all else,

it comforted us to know  
that He knows we can't do this alone

and so He has given us His Holy Spirit  
to comfort us, to strengthen us, and to empower us

I could end the sermon there  
But there's one more thing I want to add

The Holy Spirit is the power of God  
He was there in the beginning of creation  
He was there in the miracles and the resurrection of Jesus

To be perfectly honest  
The thought of having His power within me, makes me tremble  
even more than the thought of being murdered for my faith

The Spirit gives us wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues

and yet – there's those words again – and yet  
the most powerful and effective weapon in His armament  
is the power of His love

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

What's the difference between the first list and the second?

Well the first list was the gifts of the Spirit  
These can all come to us. Instantly, when we ask  
depending our needs and our circumstances

the second list is the fruit of the Spirit

a *gift* we are given – it's ours for the taking  
to bear good *fruit* requires input from us

God makes the seeds,  
and the miracle of genes in a pod  
transforming into the plant or vine,  
that's all His doing

but it's up to us to do the feeding and watering  
we need to know when to plant out  
when to lift and divide  
when to prune  
and when to cut down and throw into the fire

turning that into human terms  
both for ourselves and our church family  
we need to encourage and to nurture and to cultivate

but it all begins with the seed, and that's the gift  
which comes by God's grace alone

I began by saying how encouraged I've been of late  
by the way things are going in both our churches

And how I'm very much excited by St Peter's wish  
To get back to basics

So let's pray right now to the Father,  
through the Son  
For the Holy Spirit to lead us on