

Jesus Delivers

Third Sunday After Pentecost

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Keeep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Romans 5:1-8 (NRSV)

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² 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.³ And not only that, but we also 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 that has been given to us.⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Matthew 9:35-10:23 (NRSV)

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."^{10:1} Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;³ Philip and

Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. ⁹ Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰ no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. ¹¹ Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. ¹² As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³ If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. ¹⁶ “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹ When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²² and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Our collect today asks God for grace in order to accomplish God’s purpose: that we **“proclaim [God’s] truth with boldness, and minister [his] justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ.”** God calls us, as his people, to hold forth his truth and justice in this world. That’s a tall order. I think we all have an innate sense of truth and justice. We just know what’s true and what’s just. We become aware of this innate sense when we see untruth or injustice and get angry or grieved. I believe it’s God’s grace that helps us respond that way. In this collect we ask God for his grace because we recognize that we can’t do these things on our own.

There are things that appeal to our sense of truth and justice and compassion. One of those is Louis Armstrong’s song “What a Wonderful World”:

I see trees of green
Red roses too
I see them bloom
For me and you
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world

The colors of the rainbow
So pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces
Of people going by
I see friends shaking hands
Saying, "How do you do?"
They're really saying
I love you¹

These are beautiful images. They resonate with our sense of what's just and true and beautiful and compassionate. On the other hand, we could all bring to mind countless examples of how this world fails to deliver truth and justice and beauty and compassion. "What a Wonderful World" was written expressly for Louis Armstrong in 1968, during a time of great racial tension. The writers felt he was uniquely positioned to be an excellent spokesman for racial harmony². I think they were right.

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?q=what+a+wonderful+world+lyrics&oq=what+a+wonderful+world+lyrics&aqs=chrome..69i57.6840j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-16118157>

This song was a hit because it resonates with our innate sense of what is true and just and beautiful and compassionate. The picture it paints of diverse people saying “I love you” to one another stands out as beautiful and just. But we have to point out that these lyrics stand out because our world is disfigured by darkness and malice and deception. This *is* a wonderful world—but it’s a far cry from what our hearts tell us it ought to be. Let me ask you a question: if this world were the way you wanted it to be, the best it could be, would there be any malice, any lying, any suffering or injustice? My guess is that the answer is no.

The world that we envision in our deepest longings is very different from the world to which God calls us to **“proclaim his truth with boldness and administer his justice with compassion”**—this world. This world fails to deliver on these things in any meaningful, significant way. Of course, we all work towards these things and those are noble efforts. But they’re not going to change this world into what God wants it to be.

If this world were the way God wanted it to be—and the way we wanted it to be—there would be no need to do the things our collect talks about. God’s truth would permeate everyone’s mind and heart. Every relationship would shine out with God’s justice and love and compassion. It would truly be **“a wonderful world.”**

This is the world Jesus promises us—a world where there is no falsehood or injustice or suffering. You may have heard Revelation 21:1-4 read at a funeral: **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’”**

This is what God has in store for us and for our world—a joyful eternal future bursting with God’s life and joy, with no trace of sorrow or pain. God himself will wipe away our tears. We read it at funerals because it’s comforting to us in our grief. But we should keep this passage in mind all the time because in Jesus God has assured us that he is going to abolish sorrow and grief and injustice and lying deception completely. Jesus and only Jesus delivers love and truth and justice and compassion.

This contrast between the world that is and the world that God has in store for us is what’s behind both our reading from Romans and our gospel reading this morning. In Romans 5 Paul talks about “boasting.” We think of boasting as something arrogant people do. The dictionary defines it as speaking “with excessive pride.” But Paul boasts

very differently. He says, **“we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings.”** That passage from the Book of Revelation boasts of Jesus ushering in an entirely new world, where as Paul says, we will share the glory of God. This is Christian boasting. We brag not about what we are or what we do, but about what God has done and will do in Jesus.

And the assurance of Jesus’ complete and cosmic victory over this sadly defective world gives us hope in our sufferings. Paul says he boasts in his sufferings. He suffered tremendous opposition and physical abuse because he was proclaiming God’s truth boldly and ministering his justice with compassion. We should expect a certain amount of furious opposition to God’s truth and justice in this world because this world runs on falsehood, deception, and injustice.

Jesus predicts this in our gospel reading. Before he sends out his disciples to proclaim the gospel, he warns them of the opposition they’re going to encounter. Some will come from their own family members. Some of us may have encountered this kind of thing. More likely we’ve encountered the suffering that comes from everyday life—family stresses, a health crisis, financial difficulty, and so forth. Wherever it comes from, suffering is part of this life because this world can’t deliver truth and justice and beauty and compassion.

Jesus told his disciples, **“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33 NIV) This is why Jesus and Paul went to their deaths proclaiming God’s truth with boldness and ministering his justice with compassion. In our reading this morning, Paul tells us from his own experience how staying close to Jesus in our suffering changes us. He says, **“suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 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.”** God has our best interests at heart. He loves us more than we love ourselves. As Paul says, he loves us so much that, **“while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”** None of us wants to be called a sinner. It’s embarrassing. But it’s true. That’s why everyone you see coming out of the Ash Wednesday service has dirt on their forehead. They’re acknowledging before God and everybody else that they’re sinners and they need to be forgiven by Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

In our reading Paul makes a common-sense statement: **“rarely will anyone die for a righteous person.”** It doesn’t happen very often, but when it does, it’s news. But Paul makes it clear that’s not how God operates: **“But God *proves* his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”** This is the astonishing love our God has for us made real in his Son Jesus. And it’s this love that enables us to boast in

our sufferings, and allow God to change and mature us. God's interested in changing us into better people, but not just so we'll be better neighbors, spouses, parents, or children. No. He's preparing us for that world he's going to bring into being that Jesus delivers through his death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and his return in glory. This world can't deliver truth and justice. But God has delivered them in Jesus. So let's draw close to him every day and allow his grace to motivate us to love God and love one another in his name. When we do we'll be showing off a preview to this world of that wonderful world Jesus has in store for us.

Amen.