

Our lessons today are tightly woven strands that form a fabric of faith and trust in God's love and of what we are called to do as disciples even when the path is challenging and fraught with danger.

Paul gets to the heart of the matter very quickly. He says that we have been justified which means we have been forgiven our sins and reconciled to God so that we can rejoice in the hope that God will bring us to glory and be shielded from the judgment of wrath. In the meantime we live with the love that has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit for the work we are to do together in community.

God's love poured into our hearts calls for a response from us and that response is love, love of God and love for our neighbor. The peace we have comes from being reconciled to God and one another through Jesus Christ. This last should sound familiar to us because our mission, found on page 855 of the BCP is to *restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ*.

Somewhat subversively Paul is showing the difference between the peace of God which is accomplished through love and the Pax Romana imposed by the Roman Empire through violence and oppression. This is a reminder to us that the relationship we are to have with God and each other supersedes any loyalties that we have to the state which is why it is problematic to conflate our faith with our national identity.

Paul and Jesus, all of the prophets, and anyone who has ever tried to serve God knows that is usually involves suffering. It is after all the cross that grounds us, that prevents us from thinking we worship a God who is above it all. It is through the cross, through God's willing sacrifice that we have been saved. Furthermore Paul points out that suffering for faith ends with hope. Endurance is not passively waiting but staying engaged with the affairs of the moment – much though we would like to especially what has been going on for the last three weeks. Staying engaged because of what it demands from our faith is a test – of endurance which develops us. Paul's hope is grounded in faith and in the same way that Paul looks to Abraham as the principle on which he could say that we are justified by faith we can also look at Abraham's story of faith and hope.

The Lord first spoke to Abraham when he was 75 years old and told him to take his family and move from Haran. God promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations and that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars. While Abraham says yes to God's plan he comes to realize that God's time is not our time. Any time he jumped the gun he caused problems for himself and his family – Sarah almost ended up in Pharaoh's harem and using Hagar to beget Ishmael created a dangerous situation for all involved. The right time means according to God's plan – and patience is part of learning to trust God.

The Lord directs Abraham's travels through various perils and in our reading today has appeared not as one but as three men, famously depicted by the icon writer Andrey Rublev as the Holy Trinity. Seeing the men from the shelter of his tent Abraham greets them and offers them lavish hospitality. Hospitality to travelers was a sacred duty in the ancient Middle East. Abraham stands in attendance while the men eat and drink then predict that Sarah will have a son. Now Abraham and Sarah are old and the birth of a son would be out of the natural order of things. God is taking an active role in what happens next which is a good thing because God has been promising a son to Abraham for some time. Abraham continued to obey God but he had almost given up hope and had asked God to let him make Ishmael, his son by the slave woman Hagar his heir. The Lord said, nope, hang on. And, as the strangers had promised, Sarah does give birth to a son, a son whose very name means laughter, a gentle reminder of Sarah's incredulous laughter at the prediction that has now turned to joy.

Living in hope is not to live delusionally but to trust in God's promises. This is the good news that Jesus wants his disciples to share, the good news that the kingdom of God is come near. Near but as we know all too well, not fully realized.

Our gospel is all about discipleship, what it means to start living into that mission of reconciliation. It opens in the middle of Jesus' ministry where he has been teaching, and preaching the good news, healing, and casting out demons ...even though the Pharisees have been accusing him of being in league with the prince of demons.

Jesus ignores the Pharisees and looks out over the crowds that have been following him. He has compassion for them and tells his disciples that there is a lot of work to do. That's where they come in – it's where we come in too if we take our baptismal promises seriously. Jesus gives them the authority to drive out evil spirits, to preach, and to heal but he leaves out teaching. He is sending out his apprentices to test their first level skills. The gift of teaching will wait until after the resurrection and given the disciples collective waver of faith at the crucifixion, this makes sense. We are tried in suffering as Paul says and it was the disciples' ability to come together after the crucifixion in the face of loss that proved their strength and readiness for the next step, for teaching that which they now knew to be true.

We also hear Jesus limit the disciple's message to the people of Israel. This will change just before he leaves the disciples for the last time and then he will give them the "Great Commission" telling them to go "and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that he has commanded. (Matt 28:19-20) In any event for this first mission Jesus tells them to go without the protection of supplies, money, luggage, clothes, or even staff, and to depend on the hospitality of others – that sacred obligation. Jesus also warns that there is punishment in store for those who refuse to offer hospitality.

Jesus warns the disciples of the dangers before them and that they can trust in God when they run into trouble. Jesus assures them that the Spirit of God will be speaking through them. God works miracles yes, but usually requires some sweat equity on our part. Furthermore there is suffering involved. The disciples, will face betrayal and rejection. That's where endurance comes in, endurance and perseverance in trust and faith that their work will be rewarded. The Son of Man will come. This is our hope as well.

In all of this Jesus is asking the disciples to behave as if the kingdom of God has come near. The healing work that they do, the casting out of demons, these restore life to those who were outcast. Preaching of the "Good News" is to remind people that God is seeking for justice to prevail. Justice means that no one is oppressed, abused, or taken advantage of, or rejected because of being foreign, or poor, or sick, or alone in the world. The pursuit of justice is our work to my friends. As disciples we have inherited it from those first followers of Jesus and that responsibility is no less onerous today. The particular charge for us seems to be breaking down the barriers of race and it is not one that can be addressed without serious work to understand and dismantle the systems that we have put in place that have oppressed people of color.

We cannot prepare ourselves for the work of reconciliation to which we are called unless we ground ourselves in the knowledge and love of God and understand that there is a scriptural basis for what we are called to do, not just as individuals but as a church...

As we will pray in our collect this morning:

*Keep, 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 live and reigns with you and the Holy spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.*