

## "Ridiculous Rejoicing" Romans 5:1-11

March 4, 2012

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday In Lent

Rejoicing and celebrating are things we enjoy doing. We always look for a time and a place to rejoice and celebrate something. We may get a little irritated when something like Lent gets in the way of our rejoicing with its somber tone and emphases. But I would contend that Lent, far from being some killjoy when it comes to celebrating, actually provides the basis for the greatest and most long lasting rejoicing.

Our rejoicing usually falls within the context of some self evident parameters. A first parameter has to do with the content of our rejoicing. We rejoice when something good happens, especially when it happens to us personally. We rejoice when we experience a joyful event in our family – a birth, a birthday, a wedding, a wedding anniversary, and so on. We rejoice when we have some monetary gain – a raise in pay, a tax refund, an unexpected inheritance, and so on. We rejoice when some accomplishment comes our way – a job promotion, a graduation, or some such thing. We send gifts, have parties, and raise our glasses in a toast – all to rejoice over some good thing.

A second parameter of rejoicing has to do with timing of our rejoicing. We rejoice over the here and now. No matter how good something might be, if it's not happening right now, many people aren't interested in it nor are they willing to wait for it. Plus, once the event is over, so is the rejoicing and people are looking for the next thing to celebrate. Such an attitude is exemplified in a commercial for some wireless phone company. In it, people are shown talking about good things, such as an office retirement party, which are old hat almost before they happen, due to the swift ability for that wireless phone to text and post such information on the internet. Rejoicing over something is scornfully dismissed because "That's so 36 seconds ago!"

Despite our desire to rejoice and our constant searching for reasons to rejoice, there often seems to be little occasion to rejoice. So many bad things are happening in the here and now. There is a suicide/murder in our own town. An LCMS member is kidnapped and presumably brutally

murdered in Sydney. Students are shot by another student in a school in Ohio. Towns are destroyed by tornadoes in the south and midwest. Gas prices keep going up with no end in sight. The economy still seems to be bad. Health care is worrisome. Retirement plans are in trouble. There are many days when we cannot find reasons to rejoice at all.

There seems to be no end in sight. The future doesn't look so bright to many people. While our politicians fight during this election year about whose fault our sorry situation is, things just seem to get worse and worse. As we look to the future, we try to find more reasons to rejoice now. But it's like grasping at sand: it slips through our fingers no matter how hard we try to hold on.

Conventional wisdom says that, if we could just improve our circumstances, we could rejoice. Laws are passed and government programs devised to better our situation. Maybe you've thought that yourself: "If only such and such would happen, THEN I would be happy."

However, conventional wisdom is not Biblical wisdom. We have a God who created everything very good and planned a permanently good future so that all of creation could rejoice all of the time. That was all changed when evil and sin were introduced into our world by an angel created to be good who had fallen away. Sin infected our first parents, Adam and Eve, and was spread to all of their descendants, including each of you and me. This sin not only corrupted them and their descendants, but it also corrupted the entire world. The bad things which happen to us and around us are not the problem. They are only the symptoms of that sin and rebellion against our God and Creator. Sin, in your life and in your world, is the reason bad things happen. It is the reason you grow old, deteriorate and die, one day at a time, until you are fully dead.

Feel like rejoicing yet? Paul says there is real reason to rejoice in our text for today. He says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand." The big picture in our suffering is our rebellion against God. The Scriptures proclaim that this rebellion and conflict are now over. We have been justified – that is, declared to be right in the sight of God by

God Himself, freed from sin and its guilt – and therefore there is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

How did this all happen? God did not wait for us to end the conflict and make ourselves good enough for His acceptance. We were not able to make ourselves right with God. Our sin was too great and our corruption was too deep. God took the initiative in sending His Son, Jesus Christ. We were completely passive in this. The text says, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died (not for the good but) the ungodly....God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us....we have now been justified by his blood”.

Jesus bore the guilt for your sin. He endured the wrath of God for your sin. He paid the price for your sin. The war against God which we started and perpetuated has been ended by the God Himself and He has established peace. To say that we have peace is more than just saying there is no more conflict. Peace is a positive thing. It is a soundness and a wholeness within each person who has received this declaration of justification by faith. Your relationship with God is good and healthy because of what Jesus has done. That is the message of Lent.

It is also the reason to rejoice. We rejoice, our text says, in hope of the glory of God. We rejoice because we have hope for the future. The Biblical concept of hope is not like our modern day wishy washy understanding hope. When you speak about “hope” today, it’s nothing more than an uncertain wish for the future. Biblical hope is a certain reality about the future. We don’t just “wish” to maybe somehow and in some way to enjoy God’s glory in the future. It has been won for us by Christ’s death and guaranteed to us by Christ’s resurrection. The glory of God in heaven is like an inheritance. It belongs to us even if it’s not yet in our possession. Therefore, we can rejoice in that hope every day of our lives, no matter how our lives are going.

But life is still not easy. “We pass through a difficult and dangerous present to that future and assured glory.” (Franzmann, p.89) When we experience problems and suffering, we assume that they are bad and should not be happening to us as Christians. We may be tempted to change the

content of our faith or the practice of our faith because we think that something must be wrong. Don't fall for that trick and temptation of the devil. It is a huge lie.

Christians like you and me WILL suffer, especially when we remain true to the Word of God. Problems do not necessarily show that we are doing or believing something wrong. Often, they are proof that we are doing and believing what is right. Jesus clearly said to the disciples of His time and to us today, "In this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33)

The good news is that we don't just have to endure that trouble and suffering. We can rejoice. The text says, "More than that (rejoicing over the glory of God in heaven), we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

We can rejoice, not because we lack suffering (which is the world's way), but precisely because we have suffering. The word for *rejoice* here and in the previous verses is much more than just being happy about something. It means "a triumphant confident boasting of joy" in something. Why can we triumphantly and confidently boast of joy in our sufferings? Paul says, "We rejoicing in our sufferings, knowing...." And what do we know? Later on in the book of Romans, Paul will say, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28)

God is working for our good in all things, even suffering. "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame." It's like with physical exercise. Exercising produces short term pain for long term gain – a stronger and healthier body. In the same way, our problems, suffering, sadness and disappointment produce short term pain for a long term gain – a stronger and healthier hope which basks in God's love which has been poured into our hearts abundantly through the Holy Spirit to refresh us and reinvigorate us in our march to glory.

Some would say that Christians are unrealistic and naïve. We rejoice in the future – the guaranteed hope of the glory of God which is ours now and shall come into our possession later through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. More than that we rejoice in the present – during the good and successful times, but, even more so in the bad times of suffering and pain as we follow our Lord Jesus Christ through the same path He took while on earth. Yet our suffering only makes us stronger, producing endurance, character and hope. Ridiculous rejoicing, some might scoff. And so it is. Yet rejoicing it is and ever shall be. Amen.