

PEACE WITH GOD
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Texts: Romans 5:1-11 & John 4:5-42

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that 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.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

John 4:5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for

the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

A few weekends ago, my daughter was home from college, and one night she and I went out for sushi, and we ended up having a long conversation about why everyone she knows in her generation is sad. It started out with me asking her how it's going at school. Is she meeting a lot of people? Does she have a lot of friends? Does she go to a lot of parties? Because that's what I remember from college. That's what my friends and I did pretty much every weekend. But Jinju said college isn't like that anymore. It's a lot more subdued. She said her friends don't go to a lot of parties. They don't feel like it. They're too depressed. They mostly just sit around in each other's dorm rooms.

Why is that, I wondered, and we started talking about the world she was born into and the things that shaped her generation. It was a post 9/11 world, where anyone might be a terrorist, and we all had to take our shoes off at airports. It was a world where the U.S. was at war for two decades, and no one under a

certain age had ever experienced a single moment of peacetime. It was a world where mass shootings were common, and schools had active-shooter drills where students barricaded themselves inside their classrooms. It was a world where climate change was no longer theoretical, but sea levels were actually rising, glaciers were actually melting, and the future looked pretty bleak. It was a world where the global economy nearly collapsed, and the fragility of our whole way of life was exposed. It was a world where social media put enormous pressure on kids and made them feel like they had to live up to an impossible standard. It was a world where a virus shut down everything and showed us there's really nothing that can't fall apart.

No wonder everyone my daughter knows in her generation is sad. No wonder they don't feel like going to parties. Kids need order and stability. They need to feel safe and secure. They need to know the world is not going to end tomorrow and no matter what happens things

will be okay. And according to Jinju, people her age didn't have that growing up, and when they look around today, they feel a sense of despair. "It feels like things are out of control," she said, "and we're heading for a cliff, and there's nothing we can do to stop it."

That's a hard thing to hear from your own child, and it made me wonder if there's anything that can give her generation hope.

Conventional wisdom says hope is grounded in optimism about things getting better in the future. So for example... I hope the Steelers do better next year. I hope they make it to the playoffs. I hope they win the Super Bowl. But the problem with hope grounded in optimism is that it's not very resilient. It's easily destroyed by any kind of setback. One bad game, one tough break, and I'm ready to give up on the whole season.

What Gen Z needs is hope that's based on more than just wishful thinking, hope that doesn't evaporate the moment things don't go its way, hope that has a little more backbone to it—like the hope we see in the readings today.

In both readings, we see hope somehow managing to hang on in a world where there's very little reason to be hopeful. It's a world that's overshadowed by the Roman Empire. It's a world where everywhere you look you're reminded that Caesar is in charge, and you better not mess with him. "Don't make trouble, pay your taxes, acknowledge our authority, and we'll leave you alone to live your life more-or-less the way you want to. But step out of line, and we'll crush you." That was the Roman message, and it was backed up by the threat of violence, and if you had any doubts, all you had to do was go to a place like Jerusalem where the roads in and out of the city were lined with people hanging on crosses.

How do you have hope in a world like that? How do you not fall into total despair? The answer is, you look beyond the world, you believe in something greater, which is what we see in both of these readings.

In Romans, Paul is writing to the church in Rome—the heart of the Empire, the center of imperial power, and probably the last place

you'd expect a Christian community to thrive. In Paul's day, the Romans viewed Christians with suspicion, and they treated them with hostility—, hostility that would turn into outright persecution only a few years after this letter was written. And yet, despite all the hardships they're facing and all the suffering they're going through, Paul talks to them about being hopeful—not because things might get better someday, but because they have a relationship with God through Jesus.

In the gospel, Jesus asks a woman at a well for a drink of water, and he starts telling her about something called "living water," and she says to him, "Sir, give me this water," even though she probably doesn't think there's a chance that he will. He's a Jew, and she's a Samaritan, and Jews typically went out of their way to avoid Samaritans. They looked down on them and considered them apostates. It's a wonder Jesus even set foot in a Samaritan city in the first place.

So she probably doesn't expect him to give her the time of day, let alone living water, but that's exactly what he does. He opens her mind to an understanding of God that transcends human boundaries; an understanding of God that's life-giving. And she gets so excited she starts running around telling everyone about this man she met at the well and how amazing his was; and a group of them go to Jesus and talk him into sticking around for a few days; and they come away from that experience believing for themselves that he truly is "the Savior of the world." That's what they call him, *soter tou kosmou* in Greek, which is the same exact title the Romans gave to Caesar and plastered all across the Empire. They inscribed it on their statues. They carved it into their monuments. They stamped it onto their coins.

And the message here couldn't be any clearer. The words we see plastered all over the place are wrong. What the Romans are telling us is a lie. Caesar is not the one who saves us, Jesus is. Caesar is not the one who gives us hope, God is.

So both of these readings show hope surviving in a world where hope has no business surviving. And yet it does because it's grounded in something beyond the Roman Empire, something greater than Caesar. It's grounded in the relationship we have with God through Jesus—or as Paul puts it, the peace we have with God that Jesus gave us access to. This is hope that comes from knowing we're not alone; hope that comes from knowing the universe is not a cold, indifferent place where suffering has no meaning; hope that comes from knowing we live in a world created to be the sphere of God's dealings with us; hope that comes from knowing our lives are held by a Love that will not let us go.

Is that enough for my daughter's generation? Is that enough to outweigh all the realities they grew up with? I think so. But the question is, do they?

Like the people in the gospel, who hear the Samaritan woman's testimony, all of us, no matter what generation we are, have to seek out Jesus for ourselves and spend some time with him. We have to listen to his teachings and reflect on his presence in our lives. As we do that, we come to see who he is, and he opens our minds to an understanding of God that transcends everything we know; and understanding of God that tells us we're not heading for a cliff, we're heading for the future. And it's not a bleak future. It's a bright future. And I know that because it's the future God is making for us. Amen.