

4/27/11

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY (In unison) Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

"Growing in God's Grace"

The First Lesson

Acts 5:27-42

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(Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee, speaks on behalf of the apostles' and they rejoice in suffering.)

THE EPISTLE LESSON

1 Peter 1:3-9

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(Peter tells the church how suffering works for witness and praise.)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, **5** who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. **7** These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, **9** for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

THE GOSPEL LESSON

John 20:19-31

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(The story of Thomas helps us see God's grace in our times of weakness.)

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. **21** Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." **22** And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said,

"Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

THE SERMON / MEDITATION

“Blessed Trials”

1 Peter 1:6-7

INTRO - Sunday night a group of people from St. John went on a mission trip of sorts. Four of us went to the Palmer Correctional Center to lead monthly worship and to interact with prisoners. We heard something that we had heard before. A man said that his time in prison was good for him. God was working in his life in a way that he hadn't experienced before. He thanked God for this time of growth. Imagine, being confronted with sin and facing the trial of punishment being a time to give thanks and praise to God.

I. That is what Peter says happens in the lives of God's people in our Epistle lesson for tonight.

A. In verses 6 and 7 he writes, **6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

1. In other words, trials strengthen our faith.
2. In other words, trials in the lives of people to whom Peter is writing have and are bringing praise to God from these people in time of trouble.

B. You and I both know that is not the norm.

1. When troubles come there is often complaining and groaning.
2. When troubles come people question God.
3. When troubles come people sometimes talk against God, or even curse him, as Job's wife recommended Job do.
4. Very seldom do trials and suffering lead to praise, unless. . .

II. Have you been watching the Legislative Session in Juneau for this year? Usually they start in high hopes and good spirits. People are sure of the good they are going to accomplish. But, somewhere the sessions often get bogged down. This year, a budget did not pass, so a special session was called. Even that special session has accomplished nothing after 10 days, according to today's paper. High hopes have run into complaints and accusations.

A. Often, our hopes are built on our own plans for what we will do and accomplish.

1. But, we are weak, and can lack wisdom, and are encumbered with sin.
2. Often our best intentions get side tracked.
3. You might call the hopes for this year's legislature, old hopes that did not materialize.
4. In fact those hopes have turned into trouble for the Legislators, and our state.

B. Peter says we can give praise to God in times of trial and trouble because of “New Hope.”

1. Verses 3-5 says, **3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.**

2. In other words, when Jesus rose from the dead, when God won eternal life in heaven as a final inheritance for those who have faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin, we can face the trials of this life, because God has overcome them.

III. The Prisoner on Sunday night knew the victory of Jesus’ resurrection. In fact, he only knew it a little. We learned that our time there had really helped to educate him about Jesus’ victory and love. But, knowing the little He knew, He knew God had him in His forgiving and loving hand for eternity, so he could face the failed hopes for life that he had ruined, and he could face life knowing that if God could save him for eternity, God could give purpose and meaning to the prisoner’s life now.

A. The prisoner did not know what God would do, or how God would do it. He just knew that God was working to accomplish his will and love in this man’s life. So, in his imprisonment, he thanked and praised God.

B. Sunday we celebrated Easter. Easter is not just a church day to commemorate something. Easter is the victory of God over sin and death and Satan in Jesus’ death and rising from the dead.

1. In Easter, God has given you, not the old hope of working your own way though life and failing, God has given you the new hope found in the Jesus’ rising from the dead.

2. No matter what life brings, God has eternal life waiting for you, AND God will work His forgiveness and love in your life so that if you watch Him work, you too will give thanks and praise even in life’s trials.

CONCLUSION - In my last church in Jacksonville there was a faithful and wise career woman named Marguerite Bell. Marguerite had an important position at the local bank. After I had been there for a while, and knowing various trials she faced, I asked how work was going? She said it was horrible. But, she knew that in a year she would be retired. So, she could face anything and work to live for God, because she knew what He had in the future.

How is your life going? Do you have trials and troubles? Have you caused, to some extent, some of them? God sent Jesus to die for your sin and rise again, and as you believe your eternal life in heaven is sure. With that knowledge you can face the trials of this life, and give God thanks and praise as you serve Him.