

"Blessed, beyond Measure"

Text: Romans 8:1-11

Grace be yours and peace – true peace – from God our Father through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: Death tolls from the virus continue to rise as the worldwide shutdown stretches on. World economies seem to be teetering on the brink of collapse. Commodity prices have tanked, compounding the misery of farmers (who are wondering if they will even be able to plant this spring) and ranchers (whose cattle cost more to raise than they can earn by selling them.) Old wars drag on and new wars threaten. With few exceptions our country seems to be changing - rapidly and dramatically - for the worse. Immorality is obviously on the rise, as is our natural sense of entitlement and a general slouch toward the "something for nothing" mentality. The recent hoarding points to a general deficiency in character and a general "me first" attitude.

And life for a child of God could not possibly hold greater promise or a brighter future.

Yet it doesn't always feel that way, does it? Problems here in this vale of tears seem to have a way of piling up from time to time – to the point that it even becomes difficult to keep a future as bright as ours in sight and in focus. We plod through the days as if we have already lost, when in reality we have already won.

Our emotions do that to us. We allow relatively insignificant frustrations, failures and setbacks to tarnish all that is good in our lives. What is even more surprising is that we allow the here and now to actually dull the magnificent, crystalline promises of the hereafter. Our relevant and uplifting text for this morning will simply not allow that sort of mindset or attitude to stand, will not tolerate any sort of pessimism or gloom in the face of such a glorious and promising future – a future secured for us by the cross of Christ.

The text that will realign and reenergize us this morning – the text that offers us true peace even here on this sinful earth – is found in the 8th Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans:

ESV **Romans 8:1-11** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has*

done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ ¶ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So far the holy, inspired words of our text. We humbly acknowledge that these are not the words of mortal men, but the words of our Creator God, who desires to strengthen and comfort us through the study of these sacred words. That such gifts would indeed be ours, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Does the thought ever creep into your head that divine worship services like ours just don't seem relevant today? Do you ever think to yourself "I just don't get anything out of church."? Neither question is all that uncommon, but both are typically used to justify doing something other than going to church or studying God's Word. Both are clearly old Adam thoughts that need to be addressed.

To do that, consider both of those thoughts for a moment ("Church is not relevant" and "I just don't get anything out of it") in light of the opening verse of our text: **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Read that again – as many times as it takes until what God is here telling you really sinks in. No matter what you've thought, said, or done, through faith in Jesus Christ, God has nothing against you. He's the judge, and the judge sees absolutely nothing worthy of condemnation in you.

Clearly there is something *relevant* that is offered to sinful human beings every Sunday morning, for how could we ever regard the very words that speak of the one path to eternal life as *irrelevant*? These words also therefore *offer something* to every single human being, since they teach us how and why we *personally* can share in that eternal life.

In fact in even *imagining* that the worship of our God is not relevant, we have already insulted our God – since worship of our God is always relevant and appropriate. In examining the statement "*I don't get anything out of church*" we need to acknowledge that if something as important as eternal life is offered at church, then the focus needs to shift from what is being offered to the one who refuses to receive or appreciate it. If I am not getting anything, despite the fact that such priceless things are being offered, then the problem lies with *me*. The fact that I am not getting anything means that I am looking for the wrong things, and that I need to make some changes. Big changes. Substantial changes. Immediately.

You will recall that we began by talking about what many regard as a somewhat scary, uncertain, depressing time in our nation's history. Are things really as bad as they seem? Morally, yes. Materially, not really. The fact remains that as citizens of this great and rich land of opportunity we continue to enjoy a standard of living that is beyond the wildest dreams not only of our ancestors but of most of the rest of the world. As Christians living in a country with opportunity and religious freedom, we need to stop and count our blessings – especially our spiritual blessings.

Christians who have seen a lot of life will usually be the first to tell you that the problem is not so much reality as it is our dismal, dispirited perception of reality. You've probably all seen it before in others – like the rich kid who, though he pretty much has it all, still complains about the smallest bit of misfortune that has filled his world with woe and hardship. We don't want to be like that, but don't you suppose that that is exactly how we must often appear to our God, given all that he has done for us and how little appreciation we show in return? Can you imagine how God must react when he showers us with the fantastic news of sins forgiven and the gift of eternal life, when he offers us his Son's very body and blood in Holy Communion, and when he lavishes comfort, peace, and spiritual strength upon us, day by day and week after week, only to be rewarded with complaints? No one, of course, presume to speak for God where he himself has not already spoken, but it wouldn't be hard to imagine a reaction from him something like: "*Just what do I need to give you to make you satisfied, content, and appreciative? What would it take to make spending time in my word relevant and worth your while?*"

What then do you think is the problem? How or why could it ever be that we hear words like the first verse of our text ("***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***") and still somehow harbor the feeling that we want something more, or something different? Our text provides some answers.

If any human being is offered forgiveness, life, comfort, and hope in the course of a visit with his Lord, yet still feels that he is getting little or nothing out of it, that probably means he is looking for the wrong thing. Our text put it this way: "***For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.***" If you and I are truly hungry for the right sort of things when we enter God's house or read our Bibles, we will never be disappointed. If, on the other hand, we are expecting what our God has never promised, or what he told us *not* to expect, we will most certainly be disappointed. If that is the case, we will almost certainly experience a certain detachment - even boredom – in the face of the eternally sublime.

Have you ever been gently forced by someone – say your spouse or some other friend – to go to some little shop or store that holds zero interest to you? The problem with walking into the storehouse of God's Word and finding nothing that interests us has nothing to do with what God is offering, does it? It has everything to do with the fact that we are in the market for all the wrong things. The feeling that you simply don't get anything out of church means your mind is focused on – preoccupied with – what our text describes as "***the things of the flesh.***" This is not just a minor issue, is it? Our text goes on to describe the basic problem: "***For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.***" Far from frivolous, our text leaves no doubt that focusing on that which God never promised in his Word is a most serious spiritual condition.

What then does it mean if I regularly drift off during most or all of the sermon, or if I find myself generally disinterested during a worship service or when I read my Bible? It means that you have identified a very real and present danger in your life. It means your goals and priorities need immediate attention.

Our text for this morning is the perfect solution, the perfect antidote. Following up on that golden declaration "***There is therefore now no***

condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" we are told not just of the dangers of being earthly-minded, but of the incredible story behind God's declaration that you and I are no longer condemned. In our text we read, **"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."**

Far from irrelevant, these words teach us things that we could never know on our own; things that we could never have guessed to be true, but nonetheless *had to know* if we were to escape hell and inherit heaven. Nothing could possibly be more relevant than learning that my natural inclinations about how I can get to heaven were all wrong. It is relevant to me to learn, or to be reminded, that the ticket for my admission to heaven cannot be earned by anything that I could ever do or say. According to our text, God the Father **"sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh"** and opened the doors of heaven for all sinners by punishing his Son in our place. In other words, what we could never accomplish (because our sins had destroyed God's law-based plan) God did for us with his grace-based plan. We couldn't *earn* heaven, so God decided to give it to us free of charge. Free for us, that is. Jesus paid dearly.

These are things we could never know on our own, but we are taught and reminded of them at every service of the Word. We refer to them as "worship services" not because we are worshipped but because here our God is worshipped. God also gives us another gift through his Word that we could not possibly find anywhere else – peace. And not just a peace that we will one day enjoy in heaven, peace right here and right now. Peace, on earth. This includes the peace of mind and spirit that allows us to weather every dark storm of this immoral, frustrating, perilous world. Peace in knowing that we are right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Peace in knowing that God knows us, cares for us, and will *always* act in our best interest. Again, judge for yourself if such things are relevant. The obvious answer is that nothing could ever be more so.

God grant you then an appreciation for the truly great and relevant things that he offers you in the true Christian faith. Pray also that God would teach you to look not at what you lack, nor at what bad things *might* happen sometime in the future, but rather confidently thank your God for the blessings of the past and trust him to care for you equally well in the days to come – giving to his children always and only *exactly what each one of us needs*. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Ezekiel 37:1-14** The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." ⁷ ¶ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹ ¶ Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.'" ¹² Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

^{ESV} **John 11:17-27** Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 29, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 18 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord We Come Before Thee Now"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Ezekiel 37:1-14) How picturesque and memorable is this account from the Prophet Ezekiel. The Lord here teaches us that *physical* life (which comes from God) is not the same as *spiritual* life (which also comes from God alone). It is God alone who can grant life of any kind to mankind. He is the Lord of Life – both physical and spiritual, and we are to entrust both to him on a daily basis. We are also hereby reminded of just how hollow and pointless is physical life that is devoid of spiritual life.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 38 (Page 39)

The New Testament Lesson: (John 11:17-27) Our New Testament lesson contains one of the earliest and best testimonies concerning the true identity of Jesus Christ. Martha correctly here labels Jesus as the Promised Savior. What is more, we are also here given clear testimony concerning the physical life that will be breathed back into these mortal bodies at the Resurrection of the dead. How we ought to long for that great day, working tirelessly until it arrives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 35 (Red Hymnal)

"Songs of Praise the Angels Sang"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 8:1-11 (Printed on the back page)

"Blessed, beyond Measure"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 764 (Brown Hymnal)

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

The Offering

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn – 798 (Stanzas 1 & 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"God, We Praise You"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (NA) Average (40) Wednesday (15)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
	-11:20 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Sam Rodebaugh is considering the call to Living Savior of Eden Prairie. Pastor Mark Weis of St. Luke's of Lemmon has accepted the call to ILC. Teacher Ross Kok is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato.

Corona Virus Precautions – Having resumed public services, members are asked to continue to employ prudent precautions, including "spittin' distance" spacing, refraining from physical contact (like shaking hands and for sure the kiss of peace), covering coughs and sneezes, etc. Although members are encouraged to visit after the service, all food serving after the service has been suspended. We will continue to offer coffee.

Lenten Services – The last of our Midweek Lenten services is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7pm. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week. Our Holy Week schedule remains unchanged, with Maundy Thursday communion service on Thursday, April 9th, at 7pm and Good Friday service the following day.

Holy Communion – As noted above, Holy Communion will next be offered on Maundy Thursday, April 9th. Please contact Pastor Roehl if you desire private communion so that a time and place can be scheduled.