

Scripture

**Romans 5:1-5**

*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.*

**Romans 8:25**

*Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Message

We DO hope for what we do NOT see – don't we?

So how about some words of wisdom for someone who has lived through something like this and survived.

Back in 1527, a deadly plague hit Martin Luther's town of Wittenberg (Germany) and he wrote a letter to a friend, explaining how churches should deal with such complicated circumstances. (*May One Flee From a Deadly Plague*)

*I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.*

Thank you Martin Luther! We're doing the right things!  
Staying away, and staying apart to prevent the spread,  
Tending to the slightest symptoms with care and concern,  
Helping one another however we can.

These sure are strange days and scary times.

Earlier this week I made a couple lists:

- 1) Things we don't know
- 2) Things we do know

Guess which list was easier to make? And longer?!?

What we don't know:

- 1) What the next "restrictions" will be, and whether/how they'll be mandated or enforced.
- 2) How long kids will be out of school.
- 3) When church will be able to gather in person again.
- 4) What Holy Week / Easter will look like.
- 5) What the ramifications of this all will be on different kinds of businesses.
- 6) When we'll be able to travel again.
- 7) How many people will get sick?
- 8) How many people will die?
- 9) The impact on our financial lives / stability.
- 10) Which families will be strengthened by this experience/which families will fall apart.

What we do know:

- 1) The canals in Venice are clean.
- 2) The skies in China are clear.
- 3) Our dogs are getting lots of walks!
- 4) We're making more frequent phone calls.
- 5) We're prioritizing what's important – at home / at work.
- 6) And we're getting things long overdue done... cleaning out etc.
- 7) God is speaking to us!
- 8) The Holy Spirit is with us – we are not alone.

Remember what we heard in our Scripture lesson:

*Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

It seems like we're doing a lot of "hoping for what we do not see" these days. Which is hard. Because we are people who believe what we see, who have to experience something in order to trust it to be true.

So what happens when we DON'T experience what we're hoping for?

When we continue to see the numbers increase, despite our efforts at social distancing and all?

Well, there's a little word in the middle of the passage from Romans 5 that helps me with this long list of not-so-rhetorical questions – you probably didn't even notice it because it's so ordinary. I'll read the sentence it's in again:

*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.*

The word that helps me in times like this is...KNOWING...knowing. You see when things around me go wonky, when I find my self getting anxious and overly emotional, I can rest in and cling to the things I KNOW to be true.

*We KNOW that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.*

Suffering never FEELS good. But we KNOW that it produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope. Notice that suffering doesn't produce hope.....but that it is the starting point of a chain reaction which ends with hope – which does NOT disappoint us.

So these things I KNOW to be true – even if I don't see it, or feel it myself. I know the promises of God are true – that He'll never leave us. I know that the people of God have survived plagues and persecutions, downturns and destruction of epic proportions for centuries. I know that I am not alone – that we are not alone. I know that if God could raise Jesus from the dead, He can raise us from .... this.

I'll give the Apostle Paul the last word:

*Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?  
But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Amen.