

## INI

1 Corinthians 1,3-7

Lent 4 — 15 March 2015

**Greeting:** To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, which was read earlier:

But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; <sup>7</sup> and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

**So far the reading. Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Introduction:** It seems to me that today in North America more and more people want success, they want it fast, they want it cheap, they want it with the least amount of trouble or pain, and they want it to be entertaining.

For example, computers today are faster and faster, and idea is that the faster computers go the more success people will have. We have high expectations of modern medicine – illness will be treated faster and faster and cures will be assured. There are books which speak about how to achieve success in management or sales or golf or what have you in one minute – or sixty seconds.

But we learn from experience that even though computers may go faster, we do not think faster – or often, even better. We know that not all illnesses respond to instantaneous cures, and in some cases there are no cures. We know that there are no miracle shortcuts to being a better manager, or salesman, or golfer, or anything else in one minute. War, as we all know, can be long and bloody, and success is not assured.

What we have is that often unrealistic expectations clash with reality. But today people continue to pander to unrealistic expectations.

It should not surprise us that to have unrealistic expectations were as common in Paul's time as in ours. Paul's second letter to the early Christians in Corinth defended his apostolic authority against false teachers who were promoting false expectations about what it was to be an apostle, and what it was to be a Christian.

Paul speaks about his own weaknesses, and places being a Christian in the context of suffering, suffering on account of Christ and also the tribulations and suffering we experience in this world. Within this context of suffering, however, Paul does not speak about easy or quick solutions. Paul speaks about patience, the patience we have in the midst of suffering, the patience God has with us, and the comfort we have from God and each other.

This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “**Patience for a Lifetime – Hope for Eternity.**” I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) The God Of Comfort**
- 2) Comfort In Affliction;** and,
- 3) Patient Endurance Is Rooted In Hope**

**1) The God Of Comfort.** After a two verse introduction, Paul begins his second letter to the Corinthians by specifically identifying Who God is, that is, God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. Since we confess that Jesus is true God and true man, we may wonder how God the Father can be Jesus' God.

God is Jesus' God not according to Jesus' divinity but according to Jesus' humanity; God is Jesus' Father from all eternity. This is taught both by Jesus Himself and the apostles. After His resurrection, Jesus told Mary Magdalene to

Stop clinging to Me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I ascend to My Father and to your Father, and My God and your God” (John 20,17).

And in his first letter, the Apostle Peter writes:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1,3)

In His role as our Mediator, Jesus took on flesh and humbled Himself. As our Mediator, Jesus is our Lord, God's Anointed, the divine Son suffering as man for man, and thereby bridging the gap between man and God. Jesus is God's anointed, the Christ, the Messiah.

As the Messiah, Jesus shows us God's love and thus His compassion and His comfort. Jesus' mission was to rescue mankind from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He did this not in an outward show of force, but rather by humbling Himself and going to the Cross and dying. There, Jesus atoned once and for all for the sins of the world, and for your sins and for mine. This was love in action, love that suffers and endures, endures even death on a Cross. On the third day Jesus rose from the dead as proof that He had lived the sinless life and that His death and resurrection have won forgiveness for all. Jesus' promise to all who believe is: "Because I live, you shall live also" (John 14,19).

It is in believing that this forgiveness that Jesus won for us is ours, that we are children of our heavenly Father. Thus, God is our Father in the Good News of Jesus; we are not children of the Father by birth, but by adoption; not children by right, but by redemption.

In sending the Son, Jesus, God is indeed the Father of all mercies. Here we hear the words of the Psalmist:

Just as a father has compassion on his children,  
So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. (Psalm 103,13)

Yes, God did have compassion on us, for He sent Jesus not only to bridge the unbridgeable gap, but to conquer our greatest enemies —, sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Thus, Paul makes the point that God is not a fuzzy warm feeling, but a God

Who has reached out in history, in time and space, in order to redeem His creation by sending Jesus as the world's Redeemer. He is not a Father in the sense that everybody in some mushy way is a child of God, but He is a Father through the sacrificial death and resurrection of God the Son.

In Jesus, and through His forgiveness, God gives us comfort when it counts the most, that is,

**2) Comfort In Affliction.** People have always wondered whether affliction is a judgment of God against the person being afflicted. The question is: what did I do to deserve this affliction?

There is no question that at times affliction is, in fact, a judgment against the afflicted. In the Old Testament, we read of God's judgment against His people Israel on account of their unbelief and worship of idols and neglect of justice and mercy. But this judgment was clearly spoken of by the prophets —one need only read Isaiah or Jeremiah, and the judgment that was foretold was always contingent on repentance. God consistently told His people that He turned to them in mercy and forgiveness so that they could turn from their sins. But since they did not turn, judgment came against the nation. Jesus spoke the same words of Law and Gospel, and because the nation rejected Him, in 70 AD the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

On a personal level we can understand that evil doing, or the transgression of God's moral or written law, deserves punishment. We live in a land in which certain acts are considered criminal behavior and when the perpetrators are caught they are tried, convicted, and punished. Indeed, that is one reason why God instituted government, that is, to punish evil doers, as Paul says:

But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it [that is, the ruling authority] does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. (Romans 13,4)

No one I know has any problem with that. Peter writes:

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. (1 Peter 3,17)

We can agree with what Peter says about punishment on evil doers, but what about being afflicted for doing right, and then because God wills it? The idea that the just or righteous will suffer afflictions is also a clear teaching of Scripture.

Jesus Himself said,

A slave is not greater than His master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. (John 15,20)

To follow Jesus and pick up your cross and follow Him is to be open to the persecution of the world. As long as Jesus is only a teacher, or a guru, or a good example, the world loves Him. But as soon as He is presented as “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world,” the world hates Jesus, because it does not know the One who sent Him (John 15,21). Apart from Jesus the world cannot know that God is a God of mercy, of love, and of forgiveness.

All the other religions of the world (whether expressed in a formal religion or unexpressed through a vague concept such as “spirituality”) tell people what it is they have to do in order to get right with God; God says all such efforts are doomed, for no one can come to Him apart from Jesus. Indeed, God specifically says that it is through Jesus that He came to us (John 3,16). Jesus says that God the Holy Spirit will “convict the world concerning sin ... because they do not believe in [Him]” (John 16,8+9). Apart from Jesus, all efforts to get to God not only fall short, but in fact are sin. No one wants to hear this, and when they hear this they lash out and persecute those who speak these words.

In many places in the world it is a crime to try to speak to others about Jesus (think of Muslim countries and even Israel). In North America, courts have ruled against such organizations as school boards when they arrived at certain decisions based on “religious principles.”

Persecution for right belief and right action is no accident. Indeed, if we look to God we see that He “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Romans 8,32). It is part of God’s plan that the world not only rejects His Son but also hates those who profess faith in Jesus. They hated Jesus first, and second, they hate those who believe in Him.

But God does not leave us without comfort. The very word comfort means someone who stands alongside another to support him in times of affliction. The comfort that God promises continues. Jesus speaks about such comfort when He promises to send God the Holy Spirit:

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter [or, Helper], that He may be with you forever; that is, the Spirit of Truth, Whom the world cannot receive. (John 14,16+17)

The Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, uses the Words of the Scripture and the Sacraments to work faith in our hearts, to keep us in the one true faith, and to have us grow in that faith, for by our own strength and reason we cannot believe in Jesus or come to Him.

Thus, in affliction, God promises that He is with us. Second, He promises us forgiveness of sins. Third, where there is forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation. This life and salvation is guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection. He is not dead, but lives, and because He lives we too who believe in Him shall live also, in spite of affliction.

Paul's enemies tried to besmirch his apostolic authority by pointing out his afflictions, both on account of enemies and sickness, which can and does afflict anyone. But Paul pointed to Jesus and His afflictions. Paul's afflictions were affirmations of God's love, because in the midst of afflictions God promised that He had not abandoned Paul, and God does not abandon us.

For Paul and us, we see that

**3) Patient Endurance Is Rooted In Hope.** After his conversion, Paul's life was a life of struggle. His former friends became his enemies. Because he had persecuted the early Church, many early Christians distrusted Paul. Also, because Paul taught that Jesus has fulfilled the Law and we are saved purely through grace and not on account of works, lest any man should boast, there were those in the Jerusalem Church who remained hostile to Paul. Because Paul preached that only through the Cross of Christ do we have forgiveness of sins, because he preached against the idols of Rome, there were many Romans and others who were hostile to Paul. Also, Paul suffered from an illness which God

would not remove and which Paul called his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12,7). In all these afflictions Paul came to realize the paradox of God: God’s “strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12,9).

For Paul there was no quick or easy fix from his afflictions; they quite literally lasted a life time. Rather, to Paul, as well as to all who are afflicted, God grants an enduring patience that is rooted in hope.

Hope in Christ is firmly grounded. In the Greek world, to use this phrase is like speaking of a ship with a firm anchor. With a firm anchor, it did not matter what storms would arise, the anchor would hold. This is the same image we have of our hope in Christ. It does not matter what storms may arise in life, Christ’s promises of His presence, His forgiveness, and life eternal with Him remain firm.

In the Roman world to patiently endure in the face of suffering meant either having a stiff upper lip or to drawing on one’s own inner strength. This is not the endurance Paul speaks about. He speaks about the strength that God gives us in Christ, “Who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12,2).

Yes, Jesus endured, so that in His resurrection we have the sure and fast hope of life eternal with Him. In the weakness of the Cross, Jesus triumphed over our earthly and spiritual enemies – the world, the power of death, and the devil. These enemies are now living on borrowed time. But by deception and by stealth, however, they still attack and they can still hurt.

Paul says that part of the reason we are afflicted is so that we can share the living and eternal hope we have with others who are afflicted and thus comfort them. We are not alone. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses of those who are here as well as those who have gone before us in the faith (Hebrews 12,1).

Because Jesus has triumphed over the grave, He holds out a blessed hope for all who endure all sorts of afflictions in this world. But apart from Jesus, any hope to the afflicted ends with the grave; however, with Jesus, we have a hope that endures throughout eternity.

Furthermore, Jesus promises us that even though there is affliction, the

comfort that God offers is always more than sufficient As the Psalmist says:

Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
But the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Psalm 34,19)

Christ has forgiven us in order to deliver us.

**Conclusion.** In Christ, as we go through life there may be disappointment, but not despair; there may be conflict, but not doubt; there may be afflictions, but always comfort. Comfort in knowing that for our sake Jesus was afflicted. Comfort in knowing that in affliction He patiently endured. Comfort in knowing that for us Jesus has won the victory, now and forever. Thus we can have patience in the face of affliction, knowing that God is with us for the long haul, for time and eternity. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay & Central Valley  
21290 Birch St.  
Hayward, CA 94541-1538

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