

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 7, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 513, 518:1-3, 296, 342, 528:1-3.

Lessons: Exodus 5:22-6:9, Hebrews 12:1-15, Matthew 12:18-21.

Sermon Text: Romans 5:1-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

For decades a song titled "I never promised you a rose garden" has been sung. You may not know any other words to that song, but the idea is pretty clear. God never promised his children on earth a rose garden, that is, he never promised that everything will be easy and pleasant for them. Instead, we know, often from personal experience that God's children, believers on earth must endure suffering, hardships, and difficulties.

We read in Acts 14 about Paul being beaten and left for dead in Iconium. After leaving that city, Paul and Barnabus went to Derbe and *"They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said."* (Acts 14:21-22)

Paul, known as Saint Paul, certainly suffered many hardships as he proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ and lived in this world. He suffered especially for the message of Jesus Christ but we can certainly realize that Christians have many hardships in this life in addition to suffering because they believe in Jesus Christ and seek to follow the Word of God in all they do. Today we seek an answer from God's Word to the question

HOW SHOULD WE REACT UNDER SUFFERING?

- 1. No one's suffering is as great or as important as yours.**
- 2. But you have Hope.**
- 3. God gives Patience,**
- 4. And so you can have Confidence**

Suffering can take many forms. Words such as depression, persecution, and anguish speak of this. Those kinds of feelings have come upon all of us, all mankind, in fact, and sometimes we feel terribly burdened and beat down by these things.

We might even want to ask 'What hope is there?' If you've felt this way, you are not alone. Think about Adam and Eve. Can you imagine their feelings of disappointment and worse, when they realized the impact sin had on their lives? They no longer had a perfect life in the Garden of Eden. And sin has had an impact on the life of every single human being since. Eve thought her first-born son was the promised Savior who would crush Satan's head. Can you imagine her disappointment as she saw him grow up in a world totally corrupted by sin and then he didn't please God with his offerings? She probably recognized his sinful behavior growing up. Did she maybe, like many parents, wonder what terrible thing her son might do? Is it possible that it wasn't a total shock and surprise when he murdered his brother and was banished by God?

Even that son Cain thought his punishment on earth was greater than he could bear, perhaps not even thinking about God's eternal death and damnation. We read in Genesis 4:10-13 *"The LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you*

work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.’ Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is more than I can bear.’”

How about some other examples? God promised a son to Abraham. But he waited for 25 years. Has anyone here waited for 25 years for a promise to be fulfilled? And the descendants of Adam, Eve, Abraham and his descendants – they waited centuries for the Savior to come, even though God repeated the promise and added details to it so that it was no surprise that “the king of the Jews”, Jesus Christ, was born in Bethlehem.

How about the anxiety and depression we read of in the Psalms? Even King David wrote psalms of lamentation and sorrow. At least ten times the Psalmists speak of being “cast off”, rejected, spurned, cast away, and humbled, and that is just a concordance search of the King James Version for the phrase “cast off”. So there are many examples in Scripture of God’s people enduring suffering and all its problems.

But perhaps the greatest hopelessness, in an earthly sense? Listen to Matthew 27:46: ***“About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ – which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”***

So others have had it worse than you? Well, yes, but that isn’t the point I want to make here. You have just heard some examples from Scripture of suffering. But no matter what the situation, yours is the worst. I am not making fun of any of your suffering, but when you are suffering, you are thinking of just one person suffering – you. To you, no one has it worse, despite human aphorisms like “I was depressed at having no shoes until I met a man with no feet.” Our own situation is all we can see. Our own pain is all we can feel.

No one has had greater difficulties than you and your difficulties right now. Your own problems are the greatest problems in the world, if you let them be. No one else can really, totally, feel and see how terribly things are going for you. Your problems fill your days and nights and your life.

But you heard the word ‘hope’ when I read the sermon theme and parts. God’s Word tells us ***“we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”***

Hope. Never let it be said of you that you have no hope. You have hope in Jesus Christ. David said in Psalm 38:15 (King James Version) ***“For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.”***The New International Version says: ***“I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God.”*** (Psalm 38:15)

This isn’t just the kind of hope that we might express by saying “I hope that the Vikings will win the Super Bowl this year.” This is a sure and certain hope. Listen again to the Word of God: ***“Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”*** That’s you. Yes, you admit you are a sinner, that you are by nature “ungodly”. But in Jesus Christ you have hope, the hope of eternal salvation, the hope of something more than just this world. There really, truly is light at the end of the tunnel. And that light is the light of life, Jesus Christ.

Do you remember the most terrible thing we humans have to fear? We read in the book of Revelation: ***“Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”*** (6:15-17)

That is the terrible warning God gives to all mankind; that Jesus Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. ***“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”***

There is hope. Hope yet in God. There is light at the end of the tunnel, and you believe that light is for you. But, you say, ‘we’re still in the tunnel, and the hope seems a long way off.

We need patience. I think we've all seen how impatient humans can be. Impatience causes people to take foolish risks, as while driving – passing other cars in dangerous situations. We've seen impatience in children. They can't wait for something – a holiday, a birthday, going somewhere, even something you've promised them.

I can't give you Patience. I can't teach patience either by lecture or example. I can only point you to the Word of God, the Bible, to find and acquire patience. The more you know and remember of God's Word, the more you may find patience and examples of patience. I can point you to the book of Job. There is a man who in the first chapter lost everything on earth that is dear to him. He lost all his children, his sons and daughters. He lost all his flocks and herds and almost every one of his servants. So did he curse God? ***"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.' In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."*** (Job 1:20-22 NIV) There are 41 more chapters in that book of the Bible, and they end this way: ***"After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so he died, old and full of years."*** (Job 42:16-17) If you want some really quick reading, look at the short book of Jonah.

And you can pray for patience. Just don't pray with words like "Lord, give me patience, and give it to me right now!"

And confidence. In every moment of your suffering, you can have confidence. This isn't the kind of confidence when someone tells a dying person "Cheer up. You're going to get better." It is the kind of confidence and trust and refuge we read of in Psalm 118:8-9: ***"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."***

In what may we place our confidence? How can you have confidence in anything or anyone? Wealth? It can be stolen or disappear. Confidence that some other human will always, always be there for you? Even in our own lives people in whom we've placed our confidence – and maybe they've even vowed and promised to be there for us – have left us.

Look at Paul and the Corinthians. He'd planned – maybe we could even say "promised" to visit them again, as you heard in last week's sermon. But it didn't work out. GOD had different plans for Paul and the Corinthian Christians. Instead they got the written Word of God, not just a visit from a preacher of God.

You can have confidence that God will take care of you in all things. Eternal life is waiting for you because of what Jesus Christ did for you. Is there anything greater than that? Our life on earth is short, compared to eternity. Yes, we need to see and accept ourselves as we are. We are sinners. But God still loves us, and loves YOU and accepts you, forgiving your faults and offering opportunities for your future. Your fellow Christians love and should accept you as you are, and thus help you see God's great love for you, the ultimate and true cure for all kinds of suffering and depression. ***"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*** (Hebrews 10:21-23)

You have a future. When you accept yourself for what you are and know that others still love and support you, and best of all, that God loves you, then you can start to look ahead. You can begin to accept God's promise spoken through Jeremiah: ***"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."*** (Jeremiah 29:11) God keeps his promises. Others may let you down. You may let yourself down. But ***"God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"*** (Numbers 23:19) You have Hope in Jesus Christ. God gives Patience, and so you can have Confidence that he will care for you. Amen.