

# PEACE OF MIND

June 16, 2019 – Trinity Sunday – Fathers Day  
The Rev. Dr. Howard Chapman  
First Presbyterian Church of Marion, Iowa  
Text: Romans 5:1-5

---

## SCRIPTURE

---

Romans 5:1-5

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.

The Word of the Lord... Thanks be to God!

---

## SERMON

---

They say that your favorite music will always be the music that was popular when you really fell in love for the first time. I don't know if that is true for everyone, but Judy and I met in college and were married a week after we graduated in 1976. So I have always been a fan of classic rock from the '70s. I must not be the only one here in Iowa, because Paul McCartney was in Moline on Tuesday, and Gordon Lightfoot is in concert at the Paramount theater tonight. I like both of them as well as singers like Neal Young and Billy Joel. Then there are great groups such as Pink Floyd, Queen, Fleetwood Mac, Steely Dan and the Eagles. One group that I would include in this category, but is perhaps not as well-known is the band Boston. They are probably best known for their song "More Than a Feeling" but I took my sermon title from another hit on their debut album, a song called "Peace of Mind." The words to the chorus go like this:

I understand about indecision  
But I don't care if I get behind  
People livin' in competition  
All I want is to have my peace of mind...

One of the verses has this to say:

Now you're climbin' to the top of the company ladder  
Hope it doesn't take too long  
Can'tcha see there'll come a day when it won't matter  
Come a day when you'll be gone

I understand about indecision  
But I don't care if I get behind  
People livin' in competition  
All I want is to have my peace of mind

Now I recently heard the background story of the leader and founder of the band, Tom Scholz. It turns out he knew what he was talking about when he wrote the words to "Peace of Mind." Scholz did not grow up with any intention of being any kind of a musician. He was far more interested in mechanical things. As a kid, he loved to take things apart and figure out how they worked. He was always tinkering with electric motors, go-karts, model boats and airplanes. So it was no surprise after he graduated from high school that he headed off to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He went right on after receiving his bachelor's degree to get his masters from MIT. He was then hired as a senior product design engineer for the Polaroid Company, where he worked on a number of different projects.

As he plugged away working for this big corporation, he noticed a lot of people who were trying to climb to the top of the company ladder, and as the song said it was taking way too long. Meanwhile he was getting together with some buddies from his undergraduate days, and they were playing and recording music together. They started sending some of these demo tapes to various record companies. Most of them were rejected, but one promoter noticed and eventually they signed a deal with Epic Records. All of this was taking his time and attention away from Polaroid. Scholz realized that he was getting behind in the corporate competition, but he also recognized, as the song says, that he didn't care. What he wanted was peace of mind. However, Polaroid valued his work over the years, so initially when he tried to quit they told him to take a leave of absence. They thought his rock and roll days would be limited, and were willing to take him back when everything settled down and returned to normal. But when Boston's debut album made record breaking sales, it was clear Tom Scholz would not be returning to Polaroid. However, he did not entirely abandon his engineering training. He has a number of patents to his name, particularly for something he calls the Hyperspace guitar peddle. It creates special effects on electric guitars, and is used by a number of rock groups today.

But here we are, more than 40 years later, and many still resonate with the lyrics to his song. All we want is peace of mind. Actually for thousands and thousands of years people have been looking for just that. Many philosophers and theologians have speculated on what one needs to do to achieve a sense of calm satisfaction. What is certain is that it is not a matter of what you accomplish or accumulate. Today, psychologists will say that peace of mind comes from truly knowing who you are, valuing the person you are and want to be, and fully living in the present moment.

It sounds rather simple and straightforward, yet many continue to struggle with finding this sense of inner peace. With all the self-help books on the market, and various gurus and workshops, you would think that more and more people would be able to figure it out. But that doesn't seem to be the case. There seems to be just as much stress, depression and despair as there ever was.

Now, as followers of Jesus Christ, we would say that there is a little more to it than all this. We believe in something we call sin that keeps us from truly getting to know who we are as creatures made in the image of God. This distortion from sin causes us to focus too much on our past mistakes or to stress out over what the future might hold, making it impossible to fully live in this present moment. The Bible tells us that true peace does not come so much from knowing who we are as it is understanding who God is and what God has done to remove the barriers keeping us from experiencing true peace.

We find this in our scripture lesson for this morning taken from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Now in the chapters leading up to our text, Paul has laid out a carefully constructed argument that simply obeying the Jewish law is not enough to erase this distortion of sin. Obedience is not enough to save us, but rather it is our faith in Jesus Christ. He then opens chapter 5 by saying, "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..."

Once again we have to do some Bible Geek stuff here. There is a very interesting word in this sentence that offers us some insight into what Paul is trying to say. It is translated as "obtaining access" in our text but it is one word in the original Greek. This word was used most often in two very specific ways. The first was for a commoner being granted permission to see the king or queen. If an ordinary person was granted an audience to the royal court, he or she was said to have "obtained access" to the sovereign's attention. But the second way this word was used was for a ship at sea trying to make it into a harbor. Harbors were often built in certain locations because they offer a natural shelter from the rough weather of the open sea. However, in many cases the rocks or reefs that offer this protection are at the same time dangerous to the ship. If a ship was able to maneuver past these hazards and is finally docked it was said to have obtained access to the safety of the harbor.

Both of these images help us to understand what Paul is saying. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are now exactly where we need to be. We have obtained access to the Most High and Holy God. We are now safe

within the shelter of the harbor and have reached our goal. We are at peace with God, because we have obtained access to God's grace.

But before we go any further, it is important to note what was going on when this letter was written. It was just at a point when the Emperor Nero had come into power in the Roman Empire, and it was Nero who began the first wide spread persecution of Christians. It was starting to become very difficult for those who claimed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. So you can almost hear the original readers of this letter objecting to what has just been stated. "Wait a minute, Paul. How can this be? We are not safe in any shelter. Some of us are suffering a great deal and it is terrifying. So how can there be this peace that you are talking about if we are in such danger? What do you say to that, Paul?"

Here is how Paul responds: "...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." There are a lot of words here with many shades of meaning. If I did a thorough Bible Geek treatment on this verse, we would probably be here for hours. Let me focus on one word in this sequence and that is the word "character." Paul says suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character. This word that is translated as character is actually a term from metallurgy. In the old King James Version, they translated this word as "testing." It refers to metal that has been refined and tested and found to be pure. It means bronze or silver or gold that is ready to be used and made into something beautiful and useful.

I began by talking about classic 70's rock, but many of you know that I also like smooth jazz and that is why I am always glad to have Ray Blue come by with his saxophone when he is in town. I looked it up. It was 17 years ago in 2002 when he first played here in worship with Dick Watson. Today, when Ray comes he has a very expensive, very shiny, top of the line saxophone, but back then the one he used wasn't much to look at. It was rather dull and old, but Ray was able to make some incredible sounds with that instrument. There was an interesting story about that sax. Ray said that after World War II, there was a salvage company in Europe that went around and gathered up discarded spent artillery shells. From the brass they collected they made musical instruments, trumpets, trombones, and Ray's saxophone. The prophet Isaiah talks about beating swords into plowshares. This was beating artillery shells into musical instruments. Ray said that there was something about the stress that the metal went through in the firing of those artillery shells that created a particular tone and resonance in those horns. And no one has been able to duplicate that brass to produce the same quality of sound.

One of the big questions that always comes up whenever we are facing difficult times, is whether or not God causes the suffering in our lives. It is a complex question, but some of the answer lies in Ray Blue's saxophone. No, God does not want us to suffer any more than God wants there to be wars or the barrage of artillery fire. But like that salvage company after the war, God is able to take the discarded remnants of our tragedies and turn them into something beautiful. When we see or hear the beautiful results we think that God intended it to be this way from the beginning. But that is not the case. Rather, with God, the suffering we face is never the end of the story. There is always something more waiting for us. God can create something beautiful out of the mess and horror.

Paul says suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character or testing. Character then produces hope, and Paul goes on to say, "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." Again we find an interesting word that is translated as "poured into." The meaning of this term is of liquid being dumped out completely out of a cup or bottle so that not one drop is left in the container. The same word is used in the story of Pentecost that we heard last week, found in Acts 2, where Peter quotes the prophet Joel and says, "Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days, I will pour out my spirit." The idea is to lavish extravagantly, to overwhelm someone by giving them far more than they expected. We can have peace of mind, because through faith in Christ we have access to God's grace. This has the power to transform whatever hardships we face, because our hearts are flooded with God's love.

Boston's song "Peace of Mind" became a hit in 1976. Exactly 100 years before, in 1876, a great hymn of the Christian faith was published, that expressed some of this peace that Paul was talking about. It is a beautiful hymn in itself, but the story behind it makes it all the more poignant. The words were written by a devout Presbyterian elder named Horatio Spafford. He was a successful businessman in Chicago, making his fortune through developing real estate along the lake front. In 1871, he faced two devastating losses; first, his four-year old son died of scarlet fever, and then the Great Chicago Fire wiped out a vast portion of his investments. Two years later, Spafford and his family were starting to pull their lives back together. They decided that they would take a vacation to Great Britain, but at the last minute a business commitment came up, so Horatio Spafford remained in Chicago, while his wife, Anna and their four daughters boarded a French steamship bound for Liverpool. In the mid-Atlantic the ship collided with another and sank within 12 minutes. It was the worst civilian naval disaster up to that point in history with 226 people drowning. It would have that distinction until 39 years later when the Titanic went down. Anna Spafford survived, but their four young daughters, ranging in age from 14 to 2 years old, were all lost. Upon arriving in England she sent a telegram to her husband that read, "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

When Horatio Spafford heard the news he immediately left on the next ship he could catch. At one point in the journey, the captain called Spafford up to the bridge. He said that by their calculations they were at the exact point where the French ship had gone down. Spafford returned to his cabin, and on a piece of hotel stationery, he began to write a poem that began with this verse:

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say  
It is well, it is well, with my soul

Later on, the gospel hymn writer, Philip Bliss, set those words to music. It was published in 1876, and has become the favorite hymn of many.

Tom Scholz longs for peace of mind, but Horatio Spafford came to realize that it was well with his soul. After all he had suffered it does not seem remotely possible that he could say something like that. But he through his faith in Jesus Christ, had obtained access to God's grace. And while he had been tested beyond endurance, he had experienced the love of God poured out completely into the depths of his soul. He knew very clearly who he was, but more than that, he knew who he belonged to. There is no denying that his heart was broken, but it was well with his soul. That is the kind of peace of mind that is available to all who place their trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.