

Palm 95 Romans 5:1-11

March 8th, 2026

We often observe Jesus sending men and women on a mission - to share with others what he has shared with them. Today, Jesus sends us with the same mandate - be my body, share my word, heal, teach, witness, make disciples. A second generation disciple heard about Jesus from those who had spent time with Jesus. He heard, but believing what he heard and becoming a disciple himself took a little time.

The apostle Paul began and lived a major portion of his life as Saul – devote Jew, loyal Pharisee, teacher and protector of the Jewish religion and traditions. When he first hears about Jesus, he believes that those who are following him are falling into idolatry, polytheism – that they are corrupting their faith by believing in more than one God. They are proclaiming that Jesus is the very Son of God. For Saul and all great teachers in the Jewish faith, this could never be!! There is one God - Yahweh. All else is blasphemy. So Saul's life work, spent teaching the laws of God, now refocuses to hunting down those who are following Jesus - seeing them imprisoned, and if they refuse to amend their ways, ordering them executed.

One day, Saul is on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus. The purpose of his trip is persecuting these new Christians. Along the way, suddenly Saul is struck down by an unseeable force, blinded in an instant. And a voice calls out to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul comes to realize that the inquirer is Jesus. He comes to believe the very things that those he has been persecuting believe – that Jesus is the Son of God, sent to reconcile the world to God. Ultimately, his sight is restored. As a sign of his new faith and life, he becomes known to the world as Paul. And his life's work, from that day, is to teach, witness, share the word, establish communities of believers.

In today's scripture lesson, we find Paul trying to instruct the community in Rome, to help them understand fully what God, through Jesus, has done for them.

The theme of this passage, and many of Paul's teachings, has been described by the church as "Justification by Faith." Let's unpack that and see what it means for us, for the world.

Paul says that we have been justified by our faith. Frederick Buechner says this of "justification"... "Being justified means being brought into right relation." Then Buechner goes on to talk about Paul's experience. He says, "As far as Paul was concerned, he was the last man in the world for God to have called in this way, but God had, thereby revealing himself to be a God who was willing to do business with you even if you were in the process of mopping up Christians at the time. Paul also discovered that all the Brownie points he had been trying to rack up as a super-Pharisee had been pointless. God did business with you not because of who you were but because of who he was. ..." Buechner goes on, "At a moment in his [Paul's] life when he had least reason to expect it, Paul was staggered by the idea that no matter who you are or what you've done, God wants you on his side. There is nothing you have to do or be. It's on the house. It goes with the territory. God has 'justified you,' lined you up."

Then Paul goes on to talk about God's grace. What is this grace? Again, if I could turn to Buechner a second time ... The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you *are* because the party wouldn't have been complete without



you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you.

"There's only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you'll reach out and take it."

Paul then goes on and talks about the way life is – sometimes suffering, sometimes joy. He says that every experience builds us up, makes us more than we were before. He encourages us to trust God through it all - to take every joy and hurt, every triumph and struggle, every wonder and failure to God – to live through each moment with the realization that God is with us and will not let us down. That's why Paul states emphatically that we can live our lives in hope – not blind hope, nor naive hope, nor a hope that is possible only through denial of reality. Paul says that it is safe and sane to hope, even in the deepest darkness, because God has justified us, God's grace is forever with us.

Then Paul brings the essence, the core of his message, his belief home. He says that it was while we were yet sinners, while we were still helpless, that Christ died for us. And he follows this with a logic with which all of us can resonate. "It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It may even be that someone might dare to die for a good person. But God has shown us how much he loves us – it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us." (Romans 5:7-8)

The gospels are filled with stories about Jesus - God's gift of grace and love. Jesus surrounds and fills his disciples with love and hope, with forgiveness and good news, and then he sends them out to share all he has given to them - because, you see, it is the will of God that not one of his created be lost.

Consider the heart of Jesus as shown over and over, as demonstrated in the things he said and did, "As he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. So he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest.'" And with that Jesus sends the 12 disciples out, with his power to heal, under his authority.

"His heart was filled with pity for them ..." The heart of Jesus still aches for those who do not know him, for those who have never heard of him, for those who, for whatever reason, cannot believe that the good news is for them. And so he longs to continue to send out his disciples - you and I - with the power to heal the broken hearted, to feed the hungry, to give hope to the despairing. God aches still to birth miracles for his created. Down through the eons, in every generation, God has birthed new life - through the likes of Abraham and Sarah, and Ruth and Naomi, and Mary and Joseph, and Jesus and the 12, the women who came to the tomb, and Paul. We are the disciples of this generation. God's miracles can flow through us, as surely as they did our faith ancestors, if we would be willing, open, receptive vessels and conduits.

Hear the call of Jesus - be my body, share my word, heal, teach, witness, make disciples, help all the world know me and the salvation of our Father.