

Lent 2—February 28, 2021

Text: Romans 5:1-11

Theme: Can You Be Certain You're Going To Heaven?

When asked if you are going to heaven, I hope you answer with an assured "yes." I am consistently surprised by Christians who say something like "I hope so." I hope that it is just false modesty that prevents someone from saying "yes" with no hesitation. The greatest benefit to Holy Baptism is the ability to be fully secure in your salvation. Sometimes St. Paul is a little hard to follow because, while he was Jewish, he wrote like a German. You have to wade through all of his dependent clauses and modifiers to figure out what he is saying. If edited a little, St. Paul says in our Epistle today,

"...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...because God's love has been poured into our hearts." That's the basis of all our joy and that is why we have absolute security in our salvation. Now, he says a great deal in his letter to the Romans and elsewhere about how we should live and the choices we should make BECAUSE of the love that has been poured into us. To live as the citizens of this world is inconsistent with who we have been made by the love of God. However, even when we do live as citizens of this world instead of citizens of heaven, it in no way diminishes what God has done to us.

When faith was created in you, for most of you at baptism and for any who have not been baptized, through the Word, you were changed.

The youth participated in a virtual event this weekend. Usually, we go away to a hotel for Youth Quake this time of year, but with the virus and all, we participated online this year. The theme was "belonging." The emphasis was on how Jesus meets us wherever we are, gathers us up and changes us to be part of his family. We heard about Zacchaeus, one of the most famous people who were scooped up by Jesus. The theme text was from Romans 8 where Paul lists all the things that cannot separate us from the family into which Christ has placed us: "... neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In our Epistle for today, St. Paul reminds us that we have peace with God because God has acted to bring us into His family and, later on, in chapter 8, he makes it clear that nothing can separate us from that family. In other words, we belong. The sinful nature in you that has been corrupted by original sin was killed when faith was created. That means that while you still have the capability of sinning against God, you are not bound to sin. Because God also gave us free will, we can always choose to do whatever we wish to do but that cannot separate you from the family. You know how every family has the "black sheep?" That's the person who never seems to do things the normally accepted way, but he is still part of the family. Sometimes the roles even shift around and the golden

child can suddenly find himself being the black sheep. But nothing can remove you from the family. Likewise, in the family of God. You belong because of what Christ has done and no matter what choices you make, the chains of hell cannot hold a child of God.

On the other hand, in case the golden children out there are so full of themselves that they think that they are capable of getting to heaven on their own, St. Paul is clear on that one as well.

“...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” It is not once we did the appropriate penance Christ died for us or once we cleaned up our act, but while we were yet sinners. The Church is not a club for the righteous. The Church is the family of the forgiven. While it is true that all of us here are indeed righteous, we are righteous before God because of the love he poured into us while we were yet sinners. We belong because he claimed us not because we earned our way in.

During the season of Lent, we focus a great deal on our sin not to beat ourselves up but to magnify Christ. Our vast sin is a ruler against which the greatness of his work is measured. You know how sinful you are. You know how many times a day you give into temptation and go skipping down a dark path after Satan. Think of the mean things you have said to people, particularly your own family. Think of the times you have

judged instead of loved. Think of the hours you have spent wallowing in self-pity instead of thanking God for the millions of blessings he showers on you. Now multiply that by trillions upon trillions and you begin to approach the weight that you put on Christ's shoulders as he hung on that cross.

That is why we come to worship to hear the Word and receive his body and blood. Every week is a family reunion, a gathering of all who belong because of the work Christ did on the cross. Satan would have us forget the weight of our sin and believe that we did some of it, maybe even most of it on our own. Oh sure, Christ died on the cross but I have to do the trusting. Of course, Christ died on the cross but I have to live a life worthy of that truth. NO. You don't have to do anything but revel in the gift that has been given. You are part of this family and you belong because of Christ. Your simple, unmitigated joy is the best witness we have. We don't come here to put on sad faces and beat ourselves up for sinning. We come here to feed the faith that grasps the gift for us. That's all there is to do. The salvation has been won. Our place in paradise is secure. You belong! Rejoice.