

## ***Partner and Lord***

Romans 5:1-5

Sermon by Dan Schrock

May 26, 2013

Baptism Sunday

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>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.*  
(NRSV)

### I

Austin: since this is the day of your baptism, I want to tailor this sermon mostly for you. But it's also for everyone else. This is a congregation of good listeners.

This short passage from Romans might be easier to understand if Paul had written it in the form of a story. Instead it's a letter, and sometimes Paul gets dense when he writes letters. So I'm going to focus on just one small part of this passage and try to unpack it for us. Besides, Austin, you have a reputation for being a thoughtful person. You're smart enough and thoughtful enough to handle a more intellectually challenging text like this one.

Here's the part I want to focus on. Paul says that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. Let's see if we can understand this sequence a little better.

### II

Suffering is a fact of life. There's a lot we don't know about Paul's personal life, but we do know at least one thing: he was personally acquainted with suffering. In 2 Corinthians 11, he says he was whipped 5 different times and beaten with sticks 3 times. Once a group of people threw stones at him, and 3 times the ships he was sailing on got wrecked at sea. Often he stayed awake all night because

he couldn't sleep. Sometimes he went hungry, and sometimes he was cold because he didn't have enough clothes.

Paul knew a lot about personal suffering from his own life. All the adults gathered here today also know about suffering from their own lives. I don't know if you've suffered yet, Austin, but I do know suffering will come to you at some point in the future, if you live long enough. I once had a teacher who pointed out that we Christians don't need go looking for a cross to carry. She said life will automatically take care of that for us—that normal human living will put plenty of crosses in our path. Suffering is just an ordinary part of the human experience. We might suffer in our bodies, our minds, our emotions, or relationships, or in our spirits.

So in this part of Romans, Paul is using what he learned from his own sufferings to help other Christians understand their sufferings. From his own experience of getting whipped, beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked; from his own times of sleeplessness, hunger, and cold, Paul has learned that suffering can eventually fill us with hope.

Paul learned that the journey from suffering to hope has 3 steps. The first step is from suffering to endurance. Austin, perhaps you've had some type of illness in your life—a bad cold, a week-long bout with the flu, or something like that. Your nose runs, your muscles ache, you have a sore throat and fever, and you lie around in bed. It's a form of mild suffering. You've lived long enough to know that you just have to endure this momentary suffering, right? You know that after several days, you'll feel better. You will get over it. But for now you have to be patient. You can't fix it, so you just have to roll with it. Endure it. That's how suffering produces endurance.

The second step Paul learned is that endurance builds our character. Enduring anything makes us a stronger person. When you have to endure illness or some other kind of suffering, you naturally turn to God for help. You start to

pray like mad. “Help me, God! Save me! I can’t face this all by myself! I need your strength! I need your power!”

When we pray like this, we don’t always know how God helps us. But we can trust God actually does. God often chooses to help us in mysterious ways we don’t fully understand. This endurance makes us stronger people on the inside. You realize: hey, with God’s help I can survive this. I can get through it. Maybe I can even overcome it. Getting through it successfully gives us a little more courage, so that the next time we endure something we can walk into it as stronger people. African-Americans discovered this in the 1960s during the Civil Rights movement. Anabaptists also discovered it in the 1500s. With God’s help, enduring hardship can build our character.

The third step is from strong character to hope. When we lean on God, the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of hope. Some years ago I experienced deep spiritual suffering that lasted a long time. During those years I learned to pray more often, more persistently, and more passionately than I ever prayed before. I was desperate, if you want to know the truth. It was a struggle just to live one day at a time, and some days I wanted to give up. Looking back on it, I think prayer was one of the big things that kept me going, especially the praying I did at night just before going to bed. Sometimes in prayer I felt like I was wrestling God and sometimes I simply yielded before God. I don’t understand everything that was going on back then, but I do understand that God gave me enough hope—enough stamina, enough courage—to get up the next morning and serve God as best as I could for another day. That was hope.

### III

Austin, one of the best things about baptism is that from now on you have a partner and a Lord. Today you are making a life-long commitment to God, but

God is also making a life-long commitment to you. Your life won't always be easy because that's just the way human life is. But you are not alone. In Christ you have a life-long partner and Lord. Correction: In Christ you have an eternal partner and Lord!