



A Passionate Life

Throughout the early 1500's, Martin Luther was in deep anguish about his life's ministry. Sometimes he was completely and utterly convinced he was renewing the Church in ways God intended. Other times he fell into deep despair, flooded with doubt about what he was doing. Such is the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ, finding balance between assurance and skepticism.

Romans 5: 1-8 Therefore, 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. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

For Personal Study

You show me someone whose heart has been broken in half, who has had a professional setback, who has had a marriage problem or separation or divorce or something like that; you show me someone who has lost a loved one in a traffic accident or some unspeakably tragic kind of way, and if they walk through it and maintain endurance, then when they come up alongside someone else, there is a way about them and there's something about them that money can't buy.

Endurance and Perseverance.

As anyone who has suffered with disease or loss would tell us, suffering produces pain. Lots of it, too! It can overwhelm us at times, pushing out all other thoughts and feelings. St. Paul reminds us that even in the midst of this pain there is light amid the darkness of our suffering. For it is at these moments when we can clearly see the outline of Christ's cross pressed deeply into our lives. The

Cross beckons us to press on, knowing our Lord has already trod this path before us.

Perseverance produces character. As we respond to the claim of Christ's Cross upon our lives, we find ourselves able to do two things. First, we can follow God's commandment to have no other god before him. Nothing ever comes before our love of God through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jesus is to be the center of our life, regardless of our circumstances. Second, we may discover the peace of God, a comfort to us in our suffering. Persevering in our love for God in spite of our suffering builds our character into that which will sustain us in His love.

Character produces hope. Our renewed character speaks to the world around us as a witness to Jesus Christ. Here is the ultimate blessing in being in a right relationship with God — we become more like Jesus and that offers hope to others. Because we are human, we are always challenged.

But as a result of Jesus Christ's death on the Cross and the empty tomb three days later, we know our suffering is not in vain. Christ has given us a renewed basis for our hope: for ourselves and all people in the face of suffering or sorrow. Hope is so precious and so key to our lives as Christians. Even in our darkest hour, God is there for us, and we feel this through the hope we find in the Cross. It is this hope we can offer others. God uses our pain for good. Martin Luther suffered and struggled with his faith, his work, and the church he had given himself to. Throughout that self-imposed suffering and anguish, he persevered through regular worship attendance, daily reading of scriptures and seeking insights from his mentor. As Martin Luther discovered back in the 15th century, our relationship with God is assured and is a gift declared to us through the Cross. That's what it means to be justified through *faith*, rejoicing in the *hope* of the glory of God and realizing that God has poured out his *love* into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Readings & Questions

Monday, October 30

Acts 7: 54- 60

St. Stephen clearly suffered. How does his faithfulness to Jesus Christ, even as he was martyred, guide you to keep your faith always on Jesus and His love?

Tuesday, October 31

Matthew 15: 21-28

Our faith makes a difference to Jesus. If you sometimes struggle with why Jesus should love you, how does the Canaanite women's story help you stay faithful?

Wednesday, November 1

Philippians 1: 3-11

Paul writes to the Philippians and prays that their love will grow in the wisdom of the Lord. What can you do personally that will build up our love through Jesus Christ in the St. John faith community?

Thursday, November 2

Psalms 23

The hope that comes from our personal relationship with Jesus Christ is captured in Psalm 23. How does the hope of your relationship with Jesus sustain you, protect you and restore you?

Friday, November 3

Romans 5: 1-5

God wants to be in a loving relationship with us. To do so he sent His son, Jesus, to die on a cross to atone for our sins so that we could have that relationship. We can't earn it. How does this gift from God, of faith love and hope, guide your life in new ways?

Series Wrap Up:

- What insights about life balance have you put into action through this series?
- How does trusting Christ help the balance in your life?
- Pray about how to apply balance in your journey of faith.

The Balanced Life ...for Families

Discussion Starters

- Whom do you trust? Your parents? Other family? Your friends? What makes them trustworthy?
- Another word for trust is faith, and that's something we talk about a lot at St. John. What does *having faith in Jesus* mean to you?
- When do you spend time with God (a.k.a. PRAY)? Taking time to tell God your concerns and doubts, confess your mistakes, and thank him for his grace are all key to growing your faith. How can you make sure that God has a place in your busy life?
- What will you take away from the last six weeks that will truly help you live a healthier life?

For Parents of Younger Kids

Jesus says we have to receive the Kingdom of God like a child or we cannot enter in (Luke 18:17). We need to have faith like a child; but how do children develop their faith? The Holy Spirit helps them in their faith just like he helps you. But you also have an important role, because, in a way, your love and care for your child is a model for God's love and care for all of his children. Big stuff, but remember that God and Jesus are *your* models. Follow their lead. Parent with balance, discipline, and unconditional love. Your kids will love and trust you. And they can relate that to how they love and trust God.

TEEN'S...

What are you unsure of? Maybe it's the way you look, whether or not you'll make the team, your friendships, your role in life...or perhaps you have some doubts about whether God loves you, whether he could really forgive you for the mistakes you've made.

During this series, we've learned about taking care of ourselves in healthy, balanced ways — getting enough sleep, making good food choices, keeping a check on how many activities we are doing. We've also talked about relating to others in healthy ways. Living in balance frees us to do the work that God wants us to do, and it gives us the peace to know that we can rest in his love and mercy. It's a harsh world out there, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the judgments that surround us. We will always have doubts, and so having faith — letting your loving Father be in charge of your life — is often a daily choice. To help us in our faith, he gave us his Holy Spirit who lives in the hearts and minds of all believers. God doesn't demand unattainable perfection and, in turn, set you up for failure. No, he wants you to succeed by having faith in him, by treating others as you'd like to be treated, and by living your life with passion and purpose. Give him your doubts, and he will give you faith. Every day.