

I've been feeling out of sorts lately, and I don't like it. These past few weeks, it's been one thing after another, and just when I think I'm back, something else goes phooey. If it's not one thing it's another, and I don't like it. It gets in the way. It gets in the way of what I want to do here. It gets in the way of what I want to do at home. It gets in the way, and I don't like it. I'd like to think: "God, this is getting in the way of what you want done, so why not snap your fingers and make things right?" But I wonder if more often I just think, "Man, this really stinks, it's sure getting in my way." I'd like to think: "God, do what you want to do," but then I wonder if this "out-of-sortsness" is exactly what God wants, and I don't like it.

So this past week I was feeling out of sorts. I started reading our favorite dead German monk, and I didn't like it. He didn't tell me that I wasn't praying right, that I needed to pray more and pray harder - thankfully, he didn't tell me that. He didn't smile a big TV smile and tell me that God doesn't want me feeling out of sorts, that God wants me to be happy, and that if I just have the right kind of faith, he'll make my life right and I'll get to live my best life ever - no, thankfully he didn't tell me that either. And he didn't tell me: "God knows, and God hurts with you, and God is trying; he's really trying; you've just got to have faith that God is really trying to get things right for you; you just got to have faith and sooner or later God will get it right for you - thankfully, he didn't say that either. What did he say? That's it's a work of God that I feel out of sorts; it's a gift from God that I feel out of sorts; it's good for me that I feel out of sorts. What's not to like about that, right?

Here's what he said that I really didn't like. He said that when I'm not feeling well and it makes me short and grumpy, that when things aren't going right and that makes me impatient, that when people say things I don't like and they make me _____ - he said I don't get to think that way. You can guess what I thought of that - I don't like it. He said: Not feeling well isn't making me feel grumpy. Things not going right isn't making me impatient. People not saying what I want to hear isn't messing me up. Instead, that grumpiness, that impatience, that messed up thinking - all that comes from me, from inside me. The things going wrong in me and around me just shows me what I'm really like. Thank you, Martin Luther! Way to kick a man when he's down!

And that's good for me? Why? Why is feeling out of sorts good for me? Why is "if it's not this going wrong it's that going wrong" good for me? Why? Because it shows me who and what I am. It takes all my good excuses, and blasts them out of the water. It takes all my slick ways to shift blame, and blows them out of the air. It reminds me, nudges me, forces me to acknowledge - and not just pay lip service - to confess how much I need someone other than me to make my life right and how much I need someone other than you or my wife or my pills to make my life right.

And more than that, way more than that - it shows me I need someone to make me right, not just right for this world but right for God, because if I'm not good enough to face this world on my own, I'm sure not good enough and right enough to face a holy and righteous - high-expectation, sin-judging, guilt damning - God on my own. Whatever trifling troubles I might face today are nothing compared to the judgment, the hell, God has in store for those who don't meet his standard.

That's why our lesson is so good for me (for us) when things are going wrong - Paul shows us how good we have it with Jesus! I should make clear: in our lesson Paul is talking to us like we have Jesus. Back in chapters 2 and 3 he broke our grip on our lying and denying and blaming and excusing, our thinking that we can be good enough on our own. In chapters 3 and 4, Paul's shown us we don't have to lie and deny, blame and excuse - Jesus has taken our place as guilty - Jesus has already paid our price and taken our punishment as guilty. And through faith in Jesus, God has already forgiven us; through faith in Jesus, God already calls us righteous, right by him. Now in our lesson, Paul is talking to us like we have Jesus.

And what does he say? We have peace with God! We stand in God's grace. In our troubles, we don't have to imagine God angry with us, out to make us pay. In our troubles, we don't have to imagine God has given up on us or turned his back on us. In our troubles, we don't have to imagine God is leaving us on our own, to fend for ourselves, and all we have to look forward to is death and hell. No, with Jesus, we have peace with God; with Jesus, we stand in God's grace!

What does that mean for us? We get to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God! We're going to heaven! Instead of this and that always going wrong, we're going to heaven! Instead of this [heart] and that [mind] never good enough, we're going to heaven! Instead of the shame of our failing bodies, instead of the shame of our failing hearts and minds, instead of the shame of carrying our shame around forever, we get to look forward to sharing in the glory of God - we're going to

heaven! Oh, that sounds so good, doesn't it?! As Paul said: **“We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God!”**

Then Paul says something more, something that might not sit so well. **“And we rejoice in our sufferings!”** Those troubles - what did I say about them? “I don't like [them].” Those troubles - what did Luther say they do? They show me my dark side. What does Paul say? **“We rejoice in our sufferings!”** Why? They do more for us than show us our dark side. Our troubles are an ingredient God uses as he does his work in us to produce his bright side. Paul says: **“we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character (a tested, proven character); and character, hope.”**

Instead of trying to avoid hardship and trouble, instead of just begging to be relieved of all pain and suffering, we get to know God is at work in our hardships and troubles; God is at work in our suffering and pain.

At work to do what? To build up our endurance. I don't know about you, but I could use more pain endurance; I could use a higher pain threshold; but that isn't God's end goal. God isn't at work in us and our troubles just to build up our pain tolerance so we can put up with more troubles and hardship. No, God is at work in us to produce in us a tested, proven character. To produce in us the tested, proven character Jesus calls for - strong to deny ourselves and to follow Jesus - the tested, proven character Paul shows, **“I can do all things - I am strong for all things (good, bad, or ugly) - through him who gives me strength.”**

Why? For what purpose? So we can bring Jesus, so we can be Jesus in this world - in the hardest of times and the hardest of places - working his love and sharing his life, in the darkest of times and darkest of places shining his light. Through it all, knowing what? **“There is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** In the darkest and hardest of times and places, he will get us through to heaven.

That makes our hardships and trouble, not just something we put up with, but something we rejoice in, with Jesus. Amen.

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... it is so easy to respond to troubles and hardship with grumbling and blaming, by turning against God or giving up on God.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see that troubles and hardship are not always evils to be avoided, or signs of an unloving God worthy of our grumbling. Troubles and hardships can ways our loving God is working blessing for us.

OPENING HYMN

"I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"
Hymn 703

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
so weary, worn, and sad;
I found in him a resting place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one;
stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light.
Look unto me; your morn shall rise
and all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;

and in that light of life I'll walk
till trav'ling days are done.

OPENING SENTENCES

Our help is in the name of the Lord.
Who made heaven and earth.

CONFESSION

Brothers and sisters in Christ, during the days of Lent, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God.

The time of Lent reminds us that to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, we must also know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor. In our struggle and in our times of trouble, we know that with Jesus we have God's promise and power.

I invite you, now, to confess your sins, ask our Father for forgiveness, and commit yourselves to this struggle.

HYMN

"Lord, Have Mercy"
Hymn 652 vs. 1



1 For what we have done and left un-done we fall on your
count-less mer-cies. For sins that are known and
those un-known we call on your name so ho-ly.

For en - vy and pride, for clos - ing our eyes; for
 scorn - ing our ver - y neigh - bor. In
 thought, word, and deed we've failed you, our King; how
 deep - ly we need a Sav - ior. *Refrain I*
Refrain I
 Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy, Lord, have mer - cy
 on us. Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy,
 Lord, have mer - cy on us.

ABSOLUTION

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they turn from their wickedness and live. Therefore, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

During these days of Lent, let us implore God to give us renewal and his Holy Spirit. May we continue to abide in the true faith and at the last be received by him through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

HYMN

“Lord, Have Mercy”

Hymn 652 vs. 2

(2 For) what you have done, your life of love you per - fect - ly
 lived, we praise you. Though tempt - ed and tried, you

fixed your eyes; you fin - ished the work God gave you.

And there on the tree, a King a - mong thieves, you

bled for a world's be - tray - al. You

loved to the end, our mer - ci - ful friend; how

pure and for - ev - er faith - ful. *Refrain II*

Refrain II

Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy, Lord, have mer - cy

on us. Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy,

1 2 *Fine (last time)*

Lord, have mer - cy on us. on us.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God Almighty, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by your Holy Spirit that we may always look forward to the end of this present evil age and to the day of your righteous judgment. Keep us steadfast in true and living faith and present us at last holy and blameless before you; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Exodus 17:1-7

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 95A

Refrain



Let us shout for joy to the rock of our sal - va - tion.

Tone



Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;

let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation.

Let us come before him with thanksgiving

and extol him with music and song.

For the LORD is the great God,

the great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth,

and the mountain peaks belong to him.

The sea is his, for he made it,

and his hands formed the dry land. *Refrain*

Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our maker;
for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.
Today, if only you would hear his voice,
"Do not harden your hearts
as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness."

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen. Refrain**

SECOND READING

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

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

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Mark 8:34b

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

GOSPEL

Mark 8:31-38

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

HYMN

"Why Should Cross and Trials Grieve Me"

Hymn 831

Why should cross and trial grieve me?

Christ is near

with his cheer;

never will he leave me.

Who can rob me of the heaven

that God's Son

for me won
when his life was given?

When life's troubles rise to meet me,
though their weight
may be great,
they will not defeat me.
God, my loving Savior, sees them;
he who knows
all my woes
knows how best to end them.

God gives me my days of gladness,
and I will
trust him still
when he sends me sadness.
God is good; his love attends me
day by day,
come what may,
guides me and defends me.

From God's joy can nothing sever,
for I am
his dear lamb,
he, my Shepherd ever.
I am his because he gave me
his own blood
for my good,
by his death to save me.

Since I know God never fails me,
in his voice
I'll rejoice
when grim death assails me.
Trusting in my Savior's merit,
safe at last,

troubles past,
I shall heav'n inherit.

SERMON

Romans 5:1-8

HYMN

"It Is Well with My Soul"
Hymn 850

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. (Refrain)

It is well with my soul,
it is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
let this blest assurance control,
that Christ hath regarded my helpless estate
and hath shed his own blood for my soul. (Refrain)

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—
my sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more:
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! (Refrain)

And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend;
even so, it is well with my soul. (Refrain)

OFFERING

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PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you love your whole creation and forget none of your creatures. We bring you our supplications for all your children, for all those we love and all those committed to your care:

We implore you to hear us, good Lord.

For all who have blessed us with kindness, led us with patience, and restored and refreshed us by their sympathy and help:

We implore you to hear us, good Lord.

For all who have wished or done us ill, that you would turn their hearts to penitence and ours to blessing:

Lord, have mercy.

For all prisoners and captives and all who suffer from oppression, that you would lead them to know the perfect freedom of your Son's forgiveness, relieve their suffering, and move us to imitate you by assisting them with works of mercy and compassion:

Lord, have mercy.

For all who bear the cross of suffering, who are sick in body or in mind:

Be merciful and spare them, good Lord.

For all who are troubled by the suffering or sin of those they love:

Lord, hear our prayer.

For all who have experienced worldly loss, that in the midst of darkness and confusion they may find their peace in you:

We implore you to hear us, O God.

For all who are absorbed in their own grief, that they may be raised to share the sorrows of their brothers and sisters and to know and appreciate the fellowship of those who bear Christ's cross:

We implore you to hear us, O God.

For all who are suffering because of their faithfulness to conviction and duty, that in sacrifice they might find strength and joy; and that you, who see in secret, may uphold them by your grace, so they may at last come to an open reward:

Lord, have mercy.

For all who are undergoing temptations of the flesh or who imagine evil in their hearts, that you would enable them to overcome and obtain the victory through Christ:

Be merciful and spare them, good Lord.

For all who are lonely and sad in the midst of the joys of others, that they may know you as their Father, Friend, and Comforter:

Lord, hear our prayer.

For the infirm, the aged, and all who are approaching death, that they may find their strength in you and obtain a blessed end:

Lord, hear our prayer.

For all for whom we have forgotten to pray but who are dear to you:

Assist them according to their needs, and bring them to your heavenly kingdom, through Christ our Lord.

O God our Father, hear our intercessions, answer them according to your will, and make us the channels of your infinite pity and helpfulness.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

“Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessings”
Hymn 927

Lord, dismiss us with your blessing;
fill our hearts with joy and peace.
Let us each, your love possessing,
triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us, O refresh us,
trav’ling through this wilderness.

Thanks we give and adoration
for the gospel’s joyful sound;
may the fruits of your salvation
in our hearts and lives abound!
Ever faithful, ever faithful
to your truth may we be found.

So whene’er the signal’s given
us from earth to call away,
borne on angels’ wings to heaven,
glad the summons to obey,
may we ever, may we ever
reign with Christ in endless day.

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