

Trinity  
Year C 2019  
Romans 5:1-5

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

We hear in today in Paul's letter to the church in Rome,  
his continuing admonition  
to those who waver in their faithfulness to God.

In particular, Paul is addressing the Gentile Christians  
who have become the predominant members  
of the church in Rome  
while the Jewish Christians have been living in exile.

Emperor Nero has now come to power  
and the Jewish Christians are returning to a Christian community  
that is now predominantly Gentile.

And, as one might suspect, there appears to be tension.

While the Gentile have kept the church going during the exile,  
the Jewish Christians, such as Prisca and Aquila,  
founders of the community, have been suffering.

But even in the light of their exile and subsequent suffering,  
they have remained faithful.

And this is the point Paul is trying to make to the church in Rome.

He states:

*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*

As I began working with this piece of Scripture,  
I was put off by Paul's assertions.

We all have or most likely will have,  
a time in our lives when we will experience suffering.

Initially, I found myself battling with Paul's assertion  
that suffering produces endurance.

But then I looked at the times in my life  
when I had experienced a crisis, or a loss,  
and I began to see how one might believe  
that suffering produces endurance.

We know in those times, that we literally,  
begin each day by just throwing our legs  
over the side of the bed  
and just work our way through each minute of each day.

We do this for however long it takes

for the pain and suffering to ease.

In essence, we endure.

Now, to be sure,  
we can learn things about ourselves in times of crisis  
but I'm not sure I would consider that  
to be character building.

I don't believe that God desires that we suffer.

It seems more than likely  
that we will all have one or more painful experience  
in our life which may even inhibit our ability  
to put words to our inner feelings.

Many of us have and will endure these periods  
and come through such dark days  
with a greater knowledge of ourselves.

Others we know and love may not.

These experiences may temporarily rob us  
of our ability to find meaning and happiness,  
to dare to hope.

But each small act of taking the next breath,  
throwing our legs over the side of the bed each morning,  
putting one foot in front of the other,  
is witness to the tiny glimmer of hope that lives in us.

The hope that is embedded in our innermost being  
at the time we are created in love,  
by the One who is love,  
for love.

When I look at the times of suffering and crisis in my life,  
I can see that there were others who helped me  
to move through that time and space.

Hope can be rekindled by coming alongside someone  
and offering an ear, encouragement, words to inspire.

Words to paint a vision of how to be more to do more.

To me that is the desire of God.

That those created in love,  
by the one who is love,  
for love,  
may live into God's greatest desire.

That no child of God should walk alone,  
should suffer in silence,  
should feel voiceless or powerless or unloved.

And we are the agents of God commissioned to do just that.

To come alongside someone we know or we come to know,  
and to offer the words of hope  
that this world so desperately needs.

I accompanied some friends Thursday morning to a breakfast to support the work of The Delores Project.

Many of you know of their work with women experiencing homelessness in our city.

You may not be aware, however, that their facilities have expanded as well as their programming.

In addition to the emergency shelter, Delores Project now offers transitional and permanent housing with accompanying supportive services.

They have partnered with Rocky Mountain Communities to add 35 low income permanent units, as well as, 95 units of affordable housing for individuals and families in the workforce.

We were introduced to the new CEO, Stephanie Miller, who shared with us part of her story which included a time when she left an abusive relationship and found herself and her 2 children without shelter and without adequate access to food.

When Stephanie reached a point she never thought she would experience, she reached out to her family from whom she was estranged.

This was one turning point in her life. A moment when others came forward to ease her suffering and rekindle hope.

Since that time Stephanie has continued to expand her education and job experience in order to help those who may find themselves in a situation similar to hers.

She credits her family, and a friend and mentor who shared with Stephanie that he felt she had more to give, that she could be more, do more.

The rekindling of hope.

And so she has and continues to do so.

We heard from a woman, who has been a resident of TDP for a number of years, who became homeless after the death of a family member she had cared for using her nursing skills.

This woman speaks now of how the stability she is experiencing in her new apartment, part of the permanent supportive housing, has allowed to her to regain her sense of herself and her desire to return to nursing.

She too spoke of a friend and mentor who has stood alongside her during her recent journey and has offered her words of encouragement to be more, to do more, reigniting her hope.

Yet another resident found herself without shelter,  
trying to survive a mental health illness  
which lead to an addiction.

She too found help and support at TDP.

While sheltering at TDP  
she became an addiction counselor.  
She is now enrolled at MSU to continue her education.

She too has a friend and mentor who stood beside her  
in her suffering and beyond  
and offered words of encouragement,  
to be more, to do more.

She has and it seems she will continue to do so.

Hope does not disappoint.

Hope can be rekindled by coming alongside someone  
in support.

To offer our presence, an ear, encouragement, words to inspire  
to be more to do more.

To me that is the desire of God.

We can stand in witness to the hope embedded in  
the very fiber of our being.

But we must stand up, stand alongside of, and stand strong for those who cannot at any given moment in time.

This is our ultimate act of faithfulness.

Hope does not disappoint.