

We have been looking at the Good News we have by being Christians. We've looked at Good News about God, good news about Jesus, good news about the holy spirit and good news about the church. Today we have not just good news, we have great news, we have the best news ever and I don't know about you but I most definitely need it at the moment.

How many times do we come to church and hear great news? How often do we tell our friends church was great this morning? Well we've heard some this morning and it is the very best news for me and for you.

You will know that we are working through our creed and today, we are looking at one of our key beliefs – I believe in the forgiveness of sins. We say it every week. But why is believing in the forgiveness of sins good news?

In our reading from Romans chapter 5 the good news starts right at the beginning in verse 1 – we have peace with God.  
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Just what is this peace with God? And how do we know we have peace with God?

In human terms I guess we sometimes think of peace as being an inner feeling of calm and believe me, this being my first sermon I am far from calm inside! Indeed if there is anyone that needs to feel calm right now it is me.

Yet, because I have put my faith in Jesus - I have peace with God.

If you've put your faith in Jesus, you also have peace with God.

The peace Paul is talking about here in Romans is not some emotional sensation we feel inside that makes us feel better or in control. Far from it. It is the kind of peace that follows a reconciliation. Its the kind of peace that that leads from once being enemies, but now the best of friends.

We were once condemned sinners and Paul tells about this at great length in the preceding chapters in Romans. But Jesus paid our price. Jesus took our place and died to be our salvation. As we heard Jesus say in our gospel reading "if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins". Through believing in Jesus we now have peace with God.

And with that Good News, I've managed to write the shortest sermon in history and whilst that may well go down very well with you I can guarantee that Graham will not ask me to preach again!

But this is not the end, there is a question we haven't answered.

How do we know we have peace with God? If having peace with God is such good news, how do we know we have it? It is right there in verses 1 & 2, through faith in Jesus. This is why today we can tell everyone we meet we have such good news, what a wonderful truth we have. Because of our faith in Jesus Christ we have peace with God. We don't have to continually negotiate our salvation with God. We don't have to do anything extra, we don't have to add anything either, we do not need to improve what Jesus has done for each one of us. And importantly we don't have to rely on ourselves to have peace with God. Now that really is good news. Our faith in Jesus means we have peace with God, we are reconciled, forgiven and restored. Again in our gospel reading we hear Jesus saying "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life".

How do we ensure we will never walk in darkness? What should it be like being at peace with God?

Well in a short while we will be offering one another a sign of God's peace. We do this in nearly every communion service to show that we are at peace with one another and at peace with God. We are not enemies, we are God's people. We no longer need to feel the burden of our sins. We are a forgiven people. We have been set free to use God's love in everything we do.

In these first few verses of chapter 5 we see how God has made it crystal clear how he feels and how he sees his relationship with us.

In verse 5 "God has poured out his love into our hearts" And in verse 8 "God demonstrates his own love for us"

We are truly loved. And it is a love that we didn't deserve, we didn't earn, but we do have it. And what a joy it is to have.

What are we to do now that God has shown how much he loves us? What should our response be?

Well clearly Paul intends for us to do some rejoicing. Indeed in verse 3 we are to “rejoice in our sufferings” In verse 11 “we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” But why does God want us to be suffering or feeling under pressure? It is there at the end of verse 4, “hope”. So that we can have the hope, we need to feel under pressure. And I know all about pressure right now! We need to be serving God throughout our lives, continually being challenged, persevering and growing in our knowledge and love of God to reach that hope that Paul talks about here.

Without feeling under pressure and persevering we will never get to that hope. But why go through that pressure? Why persevere? Why, like so many people in our world, not just give up? In verse 5 we see that this hope does not disappoint us. What good news it is to not be disappointed by something. We live in a world that believes that money, possessions and life style are the main goals, and targets and that they will not disappoint us – indeed they will make us happy! So often they do disappoint, so often there is very little to rejoice about in our world.

Rejoicing under pressure goes against most things we see in our world today. In our own strength this, I would suggest, it is impossible to do. To illustrate this let us turn the clock back to about a month ago. It was our confirmation service and if you weren't there you missed a cracker. Bishop Peter Forster was speaking to us and one of our readings from Philippians and contained those well know words “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice”

That Sunday evening I was full of rejoicing. By Tuesday afternoon of that week I had run out of rejoicing. By Tuesday afternoon, I felt a complete failure. What had happened to turn my rejoicing into complete despair? As most of you will have seen on the news, the modern world attempts to measure everything and once it is measured, it can have a target, and a performance. And if it isn't performing an action plan to correct it.

For example, Merseyside Police tell us that crime is getting better – they say that there were 28,000 fewer crimes last year than the year previous - a reduction of 18% - I make that over 150,000 crimes the year before. The police proudly claim “We solved over 41,000 crimes last year”. That makes over 100,000 crimes unsolved so I will leave you to decide if that is actually good news. Our society's obsession with numbers and targets spills over into nearly everything we do. When you work in manufacturing, as I do, everything there can be broken down into tasks and providing each task is completed efficiently we have happy customers!

That Monday and Tuesday were not great days for our “delivery performance” and we had unhappy customers and I was the one listening to the complaints on the end of the phone. All my rejoicing had disappeared. I am sure that many of you will have felt exactly the same as I did that Tuesday. Frustrated and feeling a failure. I wanted my rejoicing back.

It did come back later that evening when I read from Colossians “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness”. I had forgotten to be thankful at all times, I had forgotten to pray when I really needed help. However, I did need that pressure to find my hope once more.

Which brings us back to rejoicing in our sufferings and God's love for us. It is written in verse 8. *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* God knows me, he knew me before I knew him. He knows the worst about me. No discovery can disillusion him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself. That Tuesday in work God was not disillusioned – He knew what I needed and knew what I needed to do.

Do we always put God first in our lives? This is the biggest challenge we face today. How do we respond to God given that we were once enemies, but through Jesus we are enemies no more? Are we living as if we have just been forgiven? Are we rejoicing, even when under pressure? And that is our challenge this morning – we need to live our lives, serving God as if we have truly been forgiven. We need to put our faith in Jesus in exactly the same way those early believers did in our gospel reading.

We have been forgiven, we need to commit every part of our lives to God, even those times when we feel we are going to cave in under pressure.

So our good news is that we have been forgiven forever. God has poured out his love into our hearts and we are now reconciled with Him. We need to start believing we have been forgiven and responding to the love God has for each one of us.