

Sermon Note: In Sorrow and In Rejoicing

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

This week we begin a new sermon series inviting us to explore how we live open-heartedly in a risky world and at a contentious time. Many of us experience life as a tapestry, woven with threads of both sorrow and joy. In this week's text, Paul describes his experiences of enduring hardship while rejoicing in God's grace. We might see this as Paul holding these two very real experiences in tension with one another. The passage challenges us to open our hearts widely, embracing both the trials and triumphs that come our way. In doing so, may we see how God's steadfast love sustains us through all the seasons of life.

Illustration Video

https://youtu.be/m6rXRamaQiE?si=z14v7TsY_ocr2p3i

In the 1994 film *Forrest Gump*, a dying mother reassures her son.

Video Discussion Questions

1. How does Forrest Gump's perspective on life reflect the balance of joy and sorrow?
2. What can we learn from Forrest's ability to find meaning and positivity in his experiences?
3. How does this scene illustrate the importance of embracing all aspects of life, both good and bad?

2 Corinthians 6:1-13 (NRSVue)

¹As we work together with him, we entreat you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors and yet are true, ⁹as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we are alive, as punished and yet not killed, ¹⁰as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing everything.

¹¹We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. ¹²There is no restriction in our affections but only in yours. ¹³In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. **Reconciliation** (v1-2): Paul urges the Corinthians, and us today, not to receive God's grace in vain. Instead, we are called to respond promptly to God's offer of salvation. Now is the time to accept

salvation and reconciliation. Ask for forgiveness from God and one another. What does God's grace mean to you?

2. **Endurance** (v3-10): Paul describes the trials and hardships he has endured as a minister of the gospel. Despite facing afflictions, hardships, and persecution, he and his fellow workers remained faithful. This passage highlights the reality of life challenges and the challenges of ministry. But it also emphasizes the resilience and perseverance of God's people and the requirement to continue serving God faithfully. When were you resilient and persevered?
3. **Servants of God** (v11-13): Paul expresses his deep affection for the Corinthians and calls them to open their hearts to him and his ministry companions. He urges them to be generous and to have a deep, mutual love for one another as they serve God together. How might you show deep, mutual love for someone with whom you serve?
4. **Response to God's Grace**: Paul urges readers not to let God's grace go to waste. The call to action is to respond without delay to God's offer of salvation. When was the last time you let God's grace go to waste? How did it make you feel? What will you do differently?
5. How will you live out these values in everyday life, treating others with kindness and empathy regardless of how you are treated? How will you live in this space of action in this season of your faith community?

Add'l (Optional) Discussion Questions

1. How would you define *grace*, specifically *God's grace*?
2. How does LJUMC, or church leadership, define and talk about God's grace?
3. How do we activate grace in our lives? How do we express it in our actions?
4. How do we ensure that we have not accepted God's great gift of grace in vain?
5. Which of the examples of grace in this passage seemed the easiest to extend or share?
6. How does Paul show his love for the Corinthians in this passage?
7. Who are the people in your life who need to experience this kind of grace? How could you be the hands and feet of God in their lives?

Weekly Action

This week, take a few minutes each day to reflect on both the joyful and sorrowful moments you encounter. Write down these reflections in a physical or digital journal, considering how God's presence is evident in each situation. Share one of these reflections with a trusted church friend or family member. Open your heart to God's sustaining grace, and let it guide you through both the highs and lows of life.

Prayer

Great God, We come before you with grateful hearts, acknowledging your abundant grace poured out for us. Thank you for the opportunity to be reconciled with you through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the cross. Help us to respond to your grace with the urgency of now, not letting the time we have go to waste. Amen.