

May 22 –

Sermon: Finding Hope in Challenging Times

Scripture: Romans 5:1-5

Since on this Sunday we are celebrating our music ministry I thought I would share about two people. They are a fictional composite of people I have sung beside in choirs or played beside in bands and bell choirs. First, there is Whining Will. He is the individual who complains about everything. The piece is too hard or too long. The director is not being clear. The practice is too early, late, long or short, depending upon the circumstances. He rarely rehearses outside of practice because he is too busy, doesn't need to, or forgot his music. You know the type. Everything is a challenge, there is nothing redemptive to what they are doing and all those around them wonder why they are still involved with the group. Now on the flip side there is Perky Pam. She is always the first one at practice. When the director hands out a new piece the harder it is the better. She tells everyone how she loves to be challenged. She continually encourages everyone else, praises the director and is always inviting others to join. She takes her music home with her, practices it during the week and comes filled with enthusiasm. All enjoy her energy, even if it is, at times, a bit tiring to be around her!

Now we realize that no one is always a Whining Will or a Perky Pam but you get the idea. In his letter to the Romans, Paul realizes that we all have to deal with troubles of various kinds. When talking to the Romans he was especially thinking about the difficulties that were happening to them because of their faith. We do not live in such times, so his words need to be expanded to all areas of our life.

It seems that the older we get, the more troubles we have! Our bodies age and so more trips to the doctor are required. We now worry not just about our children, but grandchildren and, for some, great grandchildren. Yes, we got troubles, lots of troubles. My professor of religious philosophy said this about troubles. "You have no choice about whether or not you will experience troubles, they are a given. What you do have a choice over is how you respond."

Believe it or not Paul wants us to be a Perky Pam! He says, "We even take pride in our problems!" Why, because if we handle them well we will find that in the midst of our struggles we will find the grace to endure them in a positive way. Those who do this

have the kind of character that draws people to them and Christ and these are the ones who are focused on the future and they always see it as hope-filled.

The Whining Will's are focused only on the moment, their problems, their struggles, their needs. They get angry at God and others for the predicament they are in. Their struggles change them and mold their character as much as Perky Pam's does hers, but it is not a life-giving change. The way challenges change them tends to push people away and theirs is a life filled with discouragement instead of hope.

Since we all have troubles, the challenge before us is to try to deal with them as Perky Pam would deal with them. None of us want to be known as a Whining Will, do we? Paul says we need to pray for the Love of God to be poured into our hearts. This will happen through the work of the Holy Spirit if we just allow it. You see, the real difference between Perky Pam and Whining Will is their attitude. For Pam loves music, the people involved in music, and the sharing of the music. That love fills her and this love helps her to embrace the practices, the challenges and all the rest with joy. She sees the bigger picture and this keeps her from being dragged down by the difficulties of the moment. Will does music because he feels he is supposed to. He was told he has a good voice, plays his instrument well, or feels guilty for all the money put into lessons so he shows up. There is no joy. Every difficulty is magnified because it is a reminder of what he has had to give up to be there.

Life is filled with troubles. How we approach them makes all the difference. If we see that God is with us, God is helping us in these times, that we are given the strength to get through them and we have hope that we will grow in faith in the midst of it, we can embrace even these challenging times. We can be a Perky Pam. Or we can see problems as being unfair, God as the afflicter, and this can fill us with anger and disgust. It ends up limiting our growth in faith and makes the challenging times of life even more difficult. We have the choice as to how to respond. May we pray daily for God to fill our hearts with joy so that we find the peace and hope that is offered to us no matter what life brings. Amen.