

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

March 07, 2021

Beloved _ Navigating Life as God's Beloved

Pastor Marion Mason

Welcome to National Community Church to everyone here in person and to everyone joining us online. Welcome to church. What a great opportunity we have to worship together today whether you're joining us even after this time, whether you're looking at YouTube, or you're looking at Venmo or any of the other platforms that we're on. One of the things that we want to do today is really dive into our series a little more. Earlier in the month, Pastor Mark started off our series with state of the church; he laid the foundation for the beloved community. Then next week, Pastor Joshua shared some of the characteristics of the beloved community. And last week, Pastor Heather talked about what it means to really fall in to the love of God and to receive the love of God.

You know one of the things that we will navigate today is really talking about what it means to live a life as the beloved. It's very challenging sometimes when we think about being beloved, right? Because when we think about all of the various things that we have going on in our lives, sometimes that seems a little incomprehensible when you think about some of the wrestling's and some of the struggles. And so today, one of the things that we're going to do, we're going to celebrate communion. It's our opportunity to remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for each one of us. And so if you're at home, please take time to get your elements now. You can grab crackers, or Cheez It's or juice or wafers, so that we can celebrate communion together a little later. Later in our service today, you will also have the opportunity to accept Jesus as your personal Savior, to start a relationship with him if you don't have a relationship with him right now.

Before we begin our time today, I want to take some time and honor women. March is Women's History Month. And so on behalf of everyone here, I just want to thank you all for all the contributions you've made, my wife... Yeah, we can clap for them. I think about my wife, I think about my daughters that will be women one day - mothers, sisters, cousins, all of you all that are here today, our colleagues, so thankful, so thankful.

Today, we're gonna spend some time in Romans chapter five; we're going to look at verses one through five. We're gonna dive into this letter that Paul writes but before we do that, I just want to share about two women that mean a lot to me in my life, my grandmother's Ruby Filder Mason and Bertha Murray, were women that knew how to love well. They knew my love languages; they spoke to me in words of affirmation and so saying the right thing at the right time in the right type of way in the right tone. They also spoke my love language of eating food, amen. Anybody else like to eat? Oh man, Grandmother Mason, I call her G-mama that was her name. She would make these biscuits, oh, homemade biscuits. If any of my family members are watching right now, please put it in the chat. You know, send us the recipe. We need that up here in DC right now. But one of the things that she used to always do with

these biscuits is that she would sneak them in a church and we didn't have chairs and nice seats, but we sat on pews. My cousins and I, my sibling, she would pass those biscuits down because she loved us. Y'all know the real story, right? She loved us but she also wants to keep us quiet.

My grandmother Murray, Bertha Murray, one of the things that she used to do is fried corn. And so she did it in a skillet, but she did it using this piece of pork called fat back. Anybody ever heard of fat back before? Fat back was so good that I used to skip the corn and go straight for the fat back. I'm thankful that I didn't have any heart issues related to that my grandmother didn't either she lived late into her 90s. But that spoke my language, that food and around the table it felt like I was a part of a family. I was a part of a family. It gave me the opportunity to learn to grow in the midst of community.

As we talked about this beloved community, it provides opportunities for all of us to grow. Are we going to make mistakes, as we're pursuing what God has called us to pursue. Absolutely, yes. Is it challenging? Absolutely, yes. I think about the value that I felt from my grandmother's. I felt loved. I felt cared for. I felt seen.

For many of us today if we're honest those are things that we desire today. We want to be seen, we want to be loved, we want to be heard but unfortunately, it doesn't always work that way. We're in situations where we might be disconnected. We might not feel loved in our own homes. We might not feel valued at our jobs. We may not even feel seen in our own communities in our neighborhoods, maybe not even our own churches. So how do we navigate that when the circumstances aren't right? I believe that the Apostle Paul has something to say about that in the book of Romans. You see, sometimes the place that we live, the place that we sit right now, that is a reality for us, sometimes we may feel disconnected. It may be based off of some trauma that we have in our life. It may be based off of the experiences that we have. It may even be some faulty thinking. Whatever it might be, that's a real place that a lot of us sit in right now. It doesn't change that fact, that we're not created to be in isolation.

And so this last year has been extremely challenging for a lot of us. This last year has revealed some things about ourselves that we wish weren't revealed. The way that we process our circumstances, the frustrations that we may feel, the even anger that we may feel towards someone else that's supposed to be a part of our beloved community. How do we fall into these places? Why do we fall into these places? You know, I think the Apostle Paul has something to say about troubles and trials. In his book of Romans, he captures this, he talks about, you know, this righteousness of God that we all, that we all need, we need God's righteousness in our life. He talks about the power of God. This is almost like a theological and a practical life primer. Paul begins by talking about salvation, but not just salvation, he talks about the results of salvation. This theological term for salvation is soteriology and it also encompasses that process. What it means is that we're first justified in that initial work, then we're sanctified with the work of the Holy Spirit in our life and finally, we're glorified. This process, as Paul has said before, throughout the book of Romans, leading up to chapter five, is one that we receive by

faith and this isn't of ourselves. You see, while faith leads to righteousness, it also leads to peace with God.

Previously, we were enemies of God, such that Adam originally sin and as a result of that all of us are born into sin and have a sin nature. Thus, we're at war with God, because of our sin nature, would not directly align with the righteousness of a holy God. However, the good news, a man, that through Jesus Christ, that we're now drawing close to God as friends, we're now draw close to him as children of the Most High God. Today, I believe that the Apostle Paul has something to say to us about that in Romans five, one through five. He gives us these tools to navigate this life, as the beloved. He tells us that we can receive and to rejoice. God may you get the glory from our time today. In Jesus name, amen.

Romans five one through five it says, " Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² 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. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ 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."

Well, my first observations when I look at that text is that the Apostle Paul uses the word we or our or us. He uses it over 12 times, not to misinterpret because I think sometimes we take that out of context. When we say we are ours or us, we use it as we're homogenous community. We're homogenous in the way we posture ourselves toward God, hopefully, but we're all different. We have different experiences, we have different backgrounds. We have different likes and dislikes, even in the same household. And so what Paul is saying is that this - we, this - our, this - us, this is a group of called out people the ecclesia, the church. I believe that the church gives us the perfect framework for the beloved community. Apart from God and the people of God we can't have the beloved community.

See, I would go out on a limb to suggest that it's impossible to have it without God and God's people. It's not some psychological or sociological or anthropological experiment, this beloved community. What it is, is the people of God being the people of God, doing what he instructs us to do, caring for those that need to be cared for, loving those that need to be loved, being transparent and vulnerable when we have to be transparent, and vulnerable. So, in Romans five, God gives us these tools of receiving and rejoicing.

Later in the month, our multicultural team and others will get up and share more about this diversity, the unity, to beloved community, that multicultural strategy that we have for our church. But that strategy isn't something that was just created this is from the Bible, y'all, who God calls us to be.

Verses one and two, let's take... can somebody just breathe, just breathe. Verses one and two, this idea of receiving what it means is that were given to, we're presented with its a gift. I think of someone taking a

baton like in track and field or a receiver receiving a pass from this quarterback, we receive a gift. This tool that we have, it's a posturing that we have to receive this act of receiving. Paul says, *"Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we also have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* So posture, we're receiving that peace. *"Through whom we've gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand and we boast in the hope of glory."* This receiving means justify that justification for our faith, for the sins that we have in our life. It doesn't mean that our sins just go away. See, Jesus paid a price for that. The word is propitiation; he paid a price for our sins. So when we're justified that initial work of salvation, we're seen righteous in the eyes of God, not by anything that we've done, but the precious blood of Jesus has washed us clean. So when the Father looks at us, he sees us as white as snow not because of anything that we've done, but because of the blood of Christ.

Romans 3:22, 26 it says, ²² *The righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,* ²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ²⁴ *and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* ²⁵ *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—* ²⁶ *he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."*

To receive and have a posture of receiving means that we are receiving that justification that's offered to us in that work of salvation. It means that we're receiving the peace that we receive from Christ Jesus that we're walking into that peace. It means that we're free from the bondage of sins, that we're no longer slaves to our sin. We're no longer slaves to that shame that we have in our life. We're no longer slaves to that embarrassment that we may have. We're no longer slaves to the things that we're doing right now in our homes that we probably shouldn't do, the things that we're thinking or the things that we're saying to other people. We have peace that is right relationship with God. We're free from worries. We're free from anxieties. It also means that we have access. It means that we have opportunity, level footing, confidence, that ability to boast, in verse two, that means that we have boldness, and courage and confidence.

I had the privilege a couple of years ago to serve as the dean of students at a college outside of Boston. And what that meant is that as a dean of students, I had, you know, one of those master keys that can open any door on campus and response, we had all these crazy responsibilities. But one of the things that was really wonderful about this experience is that my girls, my three daughters, were able to experience some things that they wouldn't be able to experience if I wasn't in that position that I was in. You see that key that I had gave us access to any building on campus, any office on campus. It also gave us access to the cafeteria. So my girls were provided for even if I wasn't around, they could eat anything they wanted, right? They could do anything they wanted on campus and they walked around like that they walked around boastfully, walked around brave because their dad was also the chief disciplinarian on campus. But they also had a mama bear back at home. You know, I don't be a mama bear back at

home right? My wife, Tamika, her nickname used to be Mika Tyson. Alright, people born in the 80's and 90's you know what I'm talking about right? That was before me though. That Mika Tyson piece so. But she would hold it down if she needed to. Mama bears protect their babies, right. But my girls had this ability to boast, they were able to walk in this. Why? Because of their relationship. As I reached out, my hand to them and they walked with me, because they were in sync with me, because they received me as I reached out to them, they were able to have this access.

Man, how much better of an opportunity we have to have access to the God of all creation because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. He pursued us, he's fully God and fully man. And so as we receive Him as our Savior, as we receive that salvation, we're able to walk in freedom, peace, we're free, we have access, we have the ability to boast, we can be bold, we can be courageous, we can be confident, not in anything of ourselves, but in the God of all creation.

I love John 16:33 says, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Proverbs three, five and six, ⁵*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path or he will make your paths straight."*

That reaching out us receiving also means us abiding. John 15:4 *"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."*

Romans five gives us this tool of receiving, it's a gift. Family, we have to receive it. It's either receiving it or not receiving it, that's our choice. Jesus has laid it out for us. He died for the sins that we committed long time ago the sins we're committing now and the sins that we will commit in the future. It's up to us to receive that.

Receiving for some of us may look different. For some you might have that relationship with Christ, you might be walking with him already and it may mean for you just abiding just a tad bit more. It may mean when you roll out of bed that you're not checking your email, or you're not checking the news or you're not turning on {singing} dun, dun, dun that ESPN and watching the same episode over and over and over and over and over again throughout the morning. It may mean us prioritizing that time with the Lord just a little bit more.

For some it may mean getting plugged into your local church and serving. Maybe you can't serve in person yet, maybe it means serving online, helping out in some type of way or even reaching out to people that are disconnected, giving them a call.

For some it may be receiving Christ for the first time walking into this relationship with him just crying out right where you are. You can do that right now. You don't even have to wait to the end of the service. You can click that button. If you're on our online campus, you can accept him right now in your home. You can just cry out Jesus, I need you in my life. I recognize that I fall short of your glory God and I need you. So yes or no, there's no gray. The Whining's sing it right 'Tomorrow Never Comes' right. We don't know what tomorrow may hold for us so it's yes or no. God gives us this tool of receiving.

Not only did the Apostle Paul remind us of this salvation that we have, this justification that we have and the posturing, the access that we get the ability to boast. Paul reminds us in verses three to five, that not only do we have this gift of receiving we have the gift in the tool of rejoicing.

Verse three, ³ *Not only so, but we also glory in rejoicing in our sufferings, (that we glory in, meaning that we rejoice in our sufferings) because we know that suffering produces perseverance;* ⁴ *perseverance, character; and character, hope.* ⁵ *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."*

Wait a minute, Paul. I could hear one of my three daughters saying now, "Ain't nobody got no time for that." Rejoicing when I'm suffering? Rejoicing when I'm in pain? I want to be careful here. I want to acknowledge this tension. Right? Because when we talk about suffering it's extremely challenging because all of us have different lived experiences. All of us have different traumas in our life. Suffering in Washington, DC may look a little different than it does in other parts of the world and so for us, I'm acknowledging that tension that we're not talking about suffering as just as just some drama in our life or just some problems. We all have some real stuff in our life, stuff that we've been dealing with our entire lives. And if you don't have any struggling or any afflictions or any sufferings yet, just wait a little while, it'll come along. If this last year hasn't been suffering for you, good lord.

But I think the Apostle Paul knew a little something about suffering. As we look back through Scripture, we see his life, Apostle Paul suffered. But I think in this verse in verse three, that's not what the Apostle Paul is talking about. It's not about addressing the suffering. It's about rejoicing in the one that can bring us through the suffering. So the object is not focused on our suffering it's focused on the God of all creation. That's what we're rejoicing in. We don't have joy, we don't rejoice when we feel pain. We don't rejoice when things hurt and we're thinking about traumas from our childhood or things that we're dealing with now, or situations, relationships that are all messed up. We don't rejoice in that we rejoice in the God that can bring us through. This rejoicing perseverance gives us this endurance, this credibility, this posturing, this rejoicing that we have allows us to navigate.

You know, one of the things that I think about when we rejoice in our sufferings, everyone knows I'm a track and field fan. I love track and field and I was a hurdler in high school, and college and after college even, but the men's 110 meter hurdles are 42 inches high. They're 10 hurdles, and you're running seven to eight strides as fast as you can over these hurdles. In the wintertime, we have indoor track, and most

recently, a young man from Chesapeake, Virginia, his name was Grant Holloway, he broke the world record 30 year old world record in the 60 meter hurdle. He ran a time of 7.29, over 60 meters over 42 inch hurdles. That is rolling. That is extremely fast. If you multiply 7.29 times .6096, which is the conversion to a 40 yard dash, he ran the equivalent of a 4.4 440 yard dash over 42 inch barriers. That is blazing fast. Of the 337 elite, male strong athletes that went to the 2019 combine only nine of them ran faster than 4.44. That's extremely fast. But what makes Grant Holloway so good in hurdles is not only is he fast, and not only has he done the rudimentary work and all the drills to be able to execute, but he has that strength, that muscular endurance, that IT factor that allows him to attack each hurdle.

But I think Paul is saying to us right now, is that we have to attack our barriers in that same type of way. And hurdles is one of those things where it's a controlled aggression, you're running as fast as you can and at any moment, your leg can go under the hurdle or your back leg, the trail, they can hit the hurdle and you can tumble and fall. As we approach the sufferings and the barriers and the hindrances, and all these things in our life, the way that we attack them is by rejoicing. Because we're not taking responsibility for anything that we're trying to do in the midst of this. We're not pulling out our spreadsheets so the next app, we're putting our trust in the God of all creation. We're saying, God, I'm gonna rejoice in this. What the Apostle Paul is saying to the people in Rome, in this moment, what he's communicating to the Romans, what he's communicating to them is, hey, it's about your perspective, and the way that you approach things.

National Community Church is about our perspective today. It's about the way we attack the barriers and the struggles and the sufferings in our life. We can either rejoice or not. Right? We know that the opposite of rejoicing is often complaining and disputing and gossiping, and all these other things that we don't want in our life. Hmm. Rejoicing in our suffering establishes a posture of recognition of God's character, in the midst of everything that's going on in our life. National Community Church, wow.

Hebrews 12, one and three says, ¹ *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."*

Don't you give up right now? I know you're tired. I know you're weary. I know you're hurting, but rejoicing in our sufferings, rejoicing, right where we are it postures ourselves in a way to attack those very things that want to take us out.

First Corinthians 9:24. *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize."*

It's to keep the right perspective. It's the way that we approach things. Perseverance leads us to endurance and it produces character. This character that we find it's a lot like one of my favorite barbecue sauces, the Mambo sauce, the Capital City, Mambo sauce. What makes this Mambo sauce good is that it's filled up with all the right ingredients that it's tested, that it's pressed and when it's squeezed, what comes out is that good Mambo sauce. Our character's the same way that words suffering, what that word suffering means is pressed almost like you're pressing grapes to make wine. And so when we're pressed, and when we're squeezed, what happens, what comes out of us should be the stuff that we're filling ourselves up with, right, the word of God, being with God's people, the love of God that should come out of us when we're squeezed, when we're pressed.

In addition to perseverance, producing character, character also produces hope. This hope that we find is not in ourselves. Verse five says that, *"Hope does not put us to shame but God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."*

You know, earlier, last summer, my wife and I have a little spot in our yard and my wife got these flowers. I was so excited, you know, for her. And then when I found out how much they cost, I wasn't quite as excited. And I watched these little flowers through the window and start to wither a little bit because our water hose didn't stretch to the little patch of grass that we were trying to plant them in. I felt myself getting mad, getting upset. Then I remembered her nickname wasn't Mika Tyson. I'm not playing that. But needless to say, we worked it out 19 years strong as friends, 18 years in courtship, 17 years of marriage. So it didn't matter that we spent a lot of money on these flowers, although I was still mad. But I watched her get a watering can and what she did, she went to the faucet, down south we call it the spigot and filled it up with water. And every day she would come back and nurture pouring this water out, poured it on to these flowers until they grew bigger and bigger and bigger and became more healthy and they weren't as withered anymore. I think about that as relates to our lives and as as we are poured into as the love of God is poured into us can we be those hope carriers National Community Church? Can we go out and water those that are around us and come back and fill back up. That's what this time is for, for us in church for us to get filled up like that locker room experience. So when we go out we can use whatever gifts God has given us to serve others faithfully administering His grace in his various forms.

Persevere, leads to character that character leads to hope and that hope doesn't put us to shame. Warren Wiersby said that "Ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels to the glory of God." Can God use you today? Can you make yourself available for him to pour his love into you so that you can pour it out to others.

Marvin Sapp wrote this song, Place of Worship. The lyrics...

Go find your place of worship
Look into your pain and find your praise
Every low place in your life
Prepared you for your hard place
Every tear you cried is water for
The garden of your victory

And even though you're in the valley
Victory comes through your adversity
Go find your place of worship

There's something about singing that captures the heart of your experience. Zephaniah 3:17 says that he will sing over you with a loud singing, that God will sing over us. You know one of the songs that comes to mind that God often sings over me is No Longer a Slave to Fear. You are a child of God.

Friends, today we have to make a decision do we want to be a child of God? Three opportunities one for that person that's looking for community... You know that you need to step into community. If you disconnected and you just want someone to spend time with you to love on you, to talk with you, to engage with you a little bit maybe you need to step into a local church body. Maybe you're that individual that's simply walking and you just need a course correction in your life. Maybe you're that person that wants to step into this personal relationship with Jesus for the first time. I invite you if you're in our online campus; just click that button to receive Christ. If you're here, you can raise your hand. If you're listening to this at another hour, you can cry out right where you are Jesus I need you.

As we continue in our time of worship and as the worship band comes I'm going to invite us just to pray right where we are. God we need you in our life. God we're wrestling and struggling with so many things. God we want to be postured in a way that we can receive. And Lord we want to posture ourselves in a way that we can rejoice, Lord, but sometimes that's so hard. Lord, we need the power of your Holy Spirit to get the glory in our life. Lord, we love you as in Jesus name. Amen.