

Romans 5:1-11 Friends With God
March 8, 2026

In the next four or five years (we don't actually know precisely), It will have been 2,000 years since the crucifixion of Christ, which happened, of course, in Jerusalem at a Passover celebration some time around 30 A.D. *His* life, *his* death, and *his* raising set people to thinking, and their thoughts continue to be inspired up until the present time.

It not only inspired books, and there have be volumes written, libraries have been filled up with the books, but also art, and music, and architecture. There are hospitals and food and clothing ministries, and universities, and of course, churches, all around.

It has commanded the attention of individuals and groups alike, and inspired images and ideas that have accompanied even the doubters and people of other faith traditions through every facet of life and every era of history.

We know what a Good Samaritan is and why they name hospitals, "Bethesda," and in spite of the admonishments about the true meaning of Christmas and Easter, deep down, even the uninitiated know that it is Christ's birth and resurrection that lie at the foundation of these Holy Days.

We know the concepts of service and sacrifice, and we know the meaning of forgiveness and compassion, eternal life.

On our end we have a difficult time with the perfection of it all, but are inspired nonetheless to nurture kindness, and justice with mercy, the love of neighbor and enemy, and when we fail are even disappointed in an encouraging sort of way, always striving to be better because we know God is working in us.

We use words like love and holiness because God has demonstrated them right before us in Christ. Even if, at first, we give attention only to ourselves and our own well-being and the taking care of our own interests, the presence of Christ compels us to look to others as well.

The authors of the gospels have told the story of Jesus, and Paul has been able to write in powerful ways about the implications of that story, the story of God's grace.

Sometimes in spite of many distractions, and even sometimes in spite of ourselves, we have listened, have become familiar enough with the story, to finish some of the sentences that we find in it;

There is no greater love . . .
Blessed are poor in spirit . . .
Let the one who has no sin . . .
My God, my God . . . there are too many to count;

And some from Paul:

We are justified by faith . . .
To live is Christ . . .

On this day, we have read one of my pauline favorites, “but God has demonstrated his love for us in this, that *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”

It has always impressed me how different the sound of that line is to untrained ears, to any ears. For most of us, our belief about forgiveness is that if someone has wronged us, and repents, confessing their wrongdoing, we ought to forgive them and be reconciled if possible.

Forgiveness comes hard enough as it is, we are not accustomed to offering it to those still actively doing us harm. But we find in this sentence an example of the distinction between the human way of forgiveness, and the divine way. For that is what has been revealed to us, that *as we are still sinning*, God has forgiven. That is the meaning of the cross of Christ. “Father, forgive them . . .

It has been a long and rough winter, but spring is on the way and when it comes, it will bless everyone, both the good and the bad. One of the main themes in the biblical story as a whole, and particularly the New Testament, is the acceptance of the Gentiles into the family of faith, which bears the same meaning.

There are hints of it in the Old Testament, such as the story of Jonah, who was sent to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, and was disappointed when they avoided punishment. Nineveh was the Assyrian capitol, which means they were the mortal enemies of

the Israelites, yet God was willing to accept and forgive.

It stands to reason that many of the faithful in Rome *were* Gentiles. The presence of the gospel in Rome, which predated the arrival of the apostles such as Peter and Paul, was itself an act of Grace, a forgiveness while sinning for them, and for Paul, for all of us.

The call to repent does not precede Grace, it *is* Grace. Paul goes further. He makes the case that, in fact, *we were enemies with God*. This statement is almost an off-hand comment, but we do well to pause for a moment of reflection upon it. To be in a state of enmity with God is not only dangerous, but it goes against the grain of our self-understanding. We don’t like to think our ourselves in this way.

At the very least we should be aware of our resistance to this idea. For this awareness can protect us from pride and from over-estimating our ability to stand alone before God. It simply *tells* us that we are unable to stand before God, *without Grace*. This inability is a part of the truth about our lives and *can* play a positive role in the development of our character because it leads us to seek God’s Grace and to ask after it.

I am reminded of a couple of my high school friends that I met again at a reunion years ago, and with whom I had an interesting conversation. One of them indicated that they were ready to retire early. The reason for this intention was that they, “wanted more

out of their lives.” They seemed bothered by the idea that they were missing out on something.

They didn’t seem to be bothered by the idea that they were mortal and would die someday, or that they were sinful and may be in need of mercy. Perhaps they had attended church all their lives and had repeatedly heard about the Forgiveness of Sin and the Resurrection of the Dead, and they believed what they were taught, and so had resolved any sense of unease caused by the actuality of death and sin.

Or perhaps they just didn’t want to deal with the reality of death and sin and had convinced themselves that they were competent enough to stand before God. We do well to pay it some attention.

Paul makes the astonishing claim that even the ways that we suffer or struggle, or deal with hardship, actually play a positive role in the development of our character as Christ followers. The idea is that struggles are not meaningless, but produce perseverance which leads to character (in the sense of, “high character.”) and leads to hope which does not disappoint, does not leave us feeling like we have missed out on something, but draws us into the realization that God’s love has been poured out into our hearts.

The insistence that we are not competent before God and are in fact in opposition to God is met by the proclamation that because of grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we have actually been reconciled to

God, and can live in the confidence of that reconciliation.

One can see that the development of a Christian theological outlook that began at the cross of Jesus, and set people to thinking, and finding ways to live out the meaning of that event, has led to the remarkable conclusion that *we are friends with God*, even though in so many ways our behavior and thinking stands at odds with that conclusion.

We have been rescued, and in that deliverance it has become possible for us to let go the weight of our sin, the anxiety that we have missed something, and the weight of the world, and live to God, actually having the experience of being better than we are, because of Christ.

Let these things be on our mind as we move through this Lenten season towards the springtime of Easter, as we worship together, and give to our special offerings, and as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, to the praise of God’s glorious grace.

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