

**Sermon for 11th March 2018 (Fourth Sunday of Lent)**  
**Exod. 6. 2-13; Ps. 13,14; Rom. 5. 1-11**

***“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”***

Paul’s letter to the Romans is unlike any of his other letters, which were addressed mostly to the congregations that he, Paul, had previously set up, in order to deal with issues that had arisen, otherwise to particular individuals. Rome was a city that Paul had not yet had the opportunity to visit, although he longed to do so. His letter, addressed to **“all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints”**, is in effect an *explanation* of the gospel for which Paul claimed he had been set apart through his calling to be an apostle directly by Jesus Christ Himself. He does not deal with the life story of Jesus on earth; rather he sets out the impact that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus have had on the relationship between God and humankind. He starts by recalling the ungodliness and wickedness of the human race from the time of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden until the call of Abraham, when God reckoned that Abraham’s belief in God was righteousness. Paul explains that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, nor the Jewish law, are of avail, but it is the heart that matters, for that is spiritual. Paul goes on to cite from the psalm, 14, that we have just sung: **“There is no one who is righteous, not even one”** for all are under the power of sin. Therefore there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But now each member of the human race is justified by God’s grace as a gift, effective through faith.

After that potted summary of the first four chapters of Romans, we come to tonight’s passage and the opening sentence that I have used as my text: **“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”** This outpouring by Paul of wonder and joy at the consequence of being justified, that is being considered by God righteous because of our faith in Him, is perhaps a little less surprising in the light of his personal history. Here is a man who, as a youth, looked after the cloaks of those involved in the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to death, and who soon afterwards used his fundamentalist enthusiasm for the Jewish law to persecute the early Christians and cause many to be imprisoned or killed as heretics. God’s grace in then calling him to be an apostle to preach the very gospel that Paul had considered to be heresy was indeed an act to be wondered at. But it added of course to Paul’s argument that God’s grace is indeed open to every member of the human race, whatever their history. The consequence of that is that each person who has faith then has the opportunity to have **“peace with God”**. For this peace cannot be bought or earned, but is available through faith and through our Lord Jesus Christ, **“through whom we have access to this grace in**

***which we stand***". Interestingly, the Greek word translated "access" was used in the context of ushering someone into the royal court, implying the granting of access to the most privileged position. In his gospel Matthew tells us that, as Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two; the barrier guarding the Most Holy Place was ripped top to bottom. Thus through Jesus Christ we are permanently welcome in the royal court. What a wondrous thought!

Later in our passage Paul gives us further cause for reflection in wonder. He has already written about having peace with God; now he speaks of reconciliation. We are all too aware from recent events in our world - eg South Africa and Northern Ireland - that the ending of hostilities can be the beginning of establishing restored relationships between the parties involved, all of whom have invariably been at fault in one way or another. How different is our situation with God who has never ceased to love us - the fault has always lain with us. The holy character of God means that He abhors all that is evil and unjust. Our rebellious nature had to be dealt with. So God's extravagant, unwarranted love led Him to make the greatest sacrifice imaginable, in order to bring peace and lay the foundations for reconciliation. Twice Paul uses the phrase "***much more surely***" to show us that our future is even more glorious to contemplate than our present state. First he points out that God has already proved His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. So we have nothing to fear from the wrath of God when the end time comes, as we will be saved through Jesus. Secondly, while we were enemies God reconciled us to Himself through Christ's death on the cross. So, having been reconciled, we will be saved by that same Jesus who is now alive; which means that we can boast or glory in God through our Saviour. What a wonderful future we have to look forward to for, ***since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.***"

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.