

Trinity B
Romans 5:1-5
June 15, 2025

“The Risk of Hope”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

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It is good to be back in the pulpit today. In the four years since we started our journey together, the last two weeks represent the first time I had not preached for two consecutive weeks. When I say it’s ‘good’ to be back, though, I recognize that’s a subjective opinion. It was a much-needed break for me, but it may also have been a much-needed break for you!

If the apostle Paul had been the minister at my church, I have a feeling I would have needed regular breaks from him. It was probably a good thing he was an itinerant preacher—moving semi-regularly from place to place, planting and tending to many congregations. In the brief reading I shared with you moments ago, Paul touched on one of his favorite topics, his own afflictions. We all know, because Paul loved to remind everyone, that he has suffered for his faith.

In his second letter to the Corinthians he tells them that five times he received 39 lashes; three times was beaten with rods; once was stoned; three times was shipwrecked; and regularly he was in danger from rivers, bandits, his own people, gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, at sea, and from false brothers and sisters—through many sleepless nights, hungry and thirsty, cold and naked. Paul kind of liked to brag about his afflictions. If Paul had been our minister, I'm guessing we would all have needed regular breaks from him. He may have been an excellent theologian, but he couldn't have been an easy companion!

But for Paul, affliction served a purpose. He told the Romans that “affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” We may or may not agree with Paul's progression here from hardship to endurance to character to hope, but I think we're likely to agree with him that “hope does not put us to shame” or more simply, hope doesn't disappoint.

Many of you here today participated with us last week in Pride Celebration Sunday. From my perspective, it was amazing. From the full sanctuary with at least eight congregations represented, to the interfaith pop-up choir that spanned all the way across the chancel, to the image of the entire congregation standing up and linking arms, it was a deeply inspirational and profoundly spiritual experience. In fact, one parent wrote me later to tell me just how moving the experience had been for their family. With that parent's permission, I'd like to share some of what they wrote:

One of my [child's] friends came with us . . . They are 17. This friend knew we were going to be going to church in the morning but I'm not sure they really thought it through because they mostly wanted to go to the Pride Parade. It was their first time attending a church service. They asked me lots of questions about it the night before like, what was going to happen in the service etc... and I could tell they were still a little confused. When we pulled up in the parking lot, got out, and started walking toward the doors they stopped and

said, “Oh no! We’re going into a church!” I reassured them I wouldn’t take them to an unsafe space and pointed to [the] front sign that had rainbows going across the screen welcoming us in and pointed out the people in all their rainbow clothes. They felt more assured and went in with us and everyone immediately made us feel welcomed . . . They had a blast . . . As each person spoke, sang, prayed, and preached my [child’s] friend just sat crying. I hugged them and told them that they were perfect, loved, and accepted just the way they are[,] not just by me, or the congregations present, but by God as well. The service moved them and that’s what we were all there for! To let those who have never heard the best news hear it, to lift up and protect the vulnerable, to lament the wrongs done to this community, and to show us all a better way together in God’s love.

This gender-queer teen had never been to a church before, was afraid of church. And they heard a message here that, perhaps, we’ve grown so accustomed to that it doesn’t hit us anymore where it counts.

As I reflected on the experience afterward, I tried to put into words what made the morning so impactful for me personally. Then it hit me. We were in a room filled with brightly adorned people of faith from multiple religious traditions; of diverse ethnic and economic and political and gender identities and orientations; singing and clapping and praying and linking arms together in the presence of our children and youth and the Divine; to proclaim the simple message that love is big, and people are beautiful, and relationships are holy. Then we stood up and spilled out onto the street with that message and were received with open arms and smiling faces and clapping crowds, like “celebrities,” as one of our members put it.

What made the morning so impactful for me personally was hope. Simple as that. Hope because in those hours I saw what Jesus surely envisioned as the realm of heaven. I saw people, motivated by love, living love, and sharing love for everyone, no matter what. I saw, not just *what was* on

June 8, 2025 from the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. I saw the possibility, the hope of *what can be* 24/7, 365 days a year. And it *was* beautiful and it *can be* beautiful.

It has been said that, “Hope is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous. A spark is just fine, as long as it’s contained.”¹ A little hope keeps us alive and working hard to prop up a system that we believe will get better. A lot of hope makes people believe they can actually change things so they *are* better. And they actually try. That kind of hope, a lot of hope, is a risky proposition. It’s risky because it’s possible that folks try to make change and fail. But it’s also risky to the system those folks seek to change because they just might succeed. Hope is worth the risk. Or as Paul says it, hope doesn’t disappoint.

I don’t know where your hope lies this morning, but I hope you have some of it. I hope you have a lot of it. Hope is worth the risk. It really is. Hope dares to imagine something better. Hope doesn’t disappoint—not because it always delivers, but because it moves us toward love. May it be so. Amen.

¹ President Snow. “*The Hunger Games*,” 2012.