

If only things were different. Without this trouble, I’d really be me.

If only life wasn’t so awkward. If only the pains were gone. If only my relationships were better, and people weren’t so hard to get along with. If only there wasn’t this coronavirus to worry about. If only being a Christian were better. I figured that having faith would give me some extra energy and optimism, but life right now is a grind. If I could just be more excited about my faith, well, that’s the real me.

If only I was less troubled about being troubled. All of these things have been weighing me down. I get impatient and snap at others. I get angry and can’t even pinpoint the source. Everything’s a greater effort than it was before. I worry. I don’t sleep well. I understand I should trust God more, so now I’m worried that I don’t have enough faith.

I’m in there somewhere. Everyone is in there somewhere, because no one is trouble-free. If only the troubles would go away. Then I’d be me; you’d be you, right?

I know. Let’s ask the apostle Paul. What do you say to do with our troubles, Paul? Are you ready? He says, glory in them. Um, could you repeat that please? Plenty of times, we’ve heard: hold on, endure, and cling to God’s promises. But glory in the troubles? What?

Here is the tough part of the message. When you’re troubled, you become worried, anxious, irritable, angry, impatient. You’re likely to give into temptations that comfort you, that make you feel better about the trouble—even when you know that they’re wrong. You find yourself saying, “I’m a mess! This isn’t who I am! If this trouble were lifted from me, then I’d be back to being me again.” But according to Scripture, that’s not the case. It’s not that trouble robs us of being who we are, but that trouble reveals who we truly are. The reality is that—by nature—we’re worry-filled, anxious, doubting; but when we’re relatively carefree, we have the energy and wherewithal to conceal it—to hide it even from ourselves—and believe that we’re doing better than we are.

In other words, troubles give us a glimpse of what we’re like without the Lord and His mercy, and it’s not a pretty picture.

And St. Paul says to glory? Yes. Why? Because, when we’re stripped down to who we really are, we’re ready to rejoice in who God is. The more we see our true nature, the more eager we are to hear of a Savior; to hear of grace; to hear of One who knows what to do and can do it right.

Now, here is how the devil wants to spin it. He wants to convince you of this: “You have troubles because God’s angry and He’s robbing you of who you are; and if God’s out to get you, leave Him behind.” But that’s a lie! The Good News is that, while troubles show us what life is like—and we are like—apart from the Lord, we are not apart from the Lord! So now, and not a moment too soon, we turn to the Good News in this passage.

For starters, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Let’s back up. You’ve been justified by faith. Rather than declare you guilty and make you pay for your sin, God has declared Jesus guilty and made Him pay on the cross for your sin. So what? So, this is where to begin when troubled: you begin with the awareness that this trouble is not proof that God is out to get you. He’s already “gotten” His Son for your sin. His anger against sin is gone, and all He has left for you is peace for Jesus’ sake. All He has left for you is forgiveness and comfort and help. If you’re trusting in yourself, you’re going to refuse all of these blessings; so the Lord permits troubles so you don’t trust in yourself.

This is where the glory is. This is cause to be thankful: the Lord does not leave you trusting in your patience or your calm or your ability to remain cool under pressure. Instead, He lets you see who you are so that you understand your need for Him. You don’t have a God who only loves you during good times, and you don’t have a God who only loves you when you’re good.

You have a loving Lord who says, “I desire you to have life so much that I gave My Son on the cross for you long before you were born. I desire you to be My child so much that I’ve made you Mine through Holy Baptism, and I still make sure I speak My Word to you and feed you My Supper. I permit trials troubles to come so that you may learn the art of enduring trouble certain of My grace. Certain of my love and approval. That perseverance will lead to character—it will lead to you knowing your true worth. You are priceless because My Son has paid for you with His blood. And because you have that character, that worth, you have hope that will not disappoint. You have the hope that you are Mine, and that deliverance is coming, it’s only a matter of when, and it’s a perfect ‘when.’”

So, rejoice in the trouble. It’s making you see yourself clearly. And that’s causing you to depend on God more fully.

And, rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Your trouble has an endpoint. You do not. You will always know the greatness of Jesus. There are brighter days ahead.