

**The work of the Holy Spirit | Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15 | LUMC | June 12, 2022  
By Rev Grace Kanake**

Dear Church family and friends: last week we encountered the Holy Spirit, our counselor, teacher, and helper. The Holy Spirit entered us at baptism and continues to influence our lives. Today we review the work of the Holy Spirit on Peace and Justice Sunday, also known as the Trinity Sunday. One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to provide peace and justice amidst our sufferings.

A peace and justice sermon can cover local issues, or it can focus on global peace and justice. Such a sermon can implore us to be the light and the salt of the world writhing with injustice and violence, and to move the world toward peaceful coexistence. It is true we know the war between Russia and Ukraine is affecting global politics and economies and is affecting cultural and social norms. The effect of this war is felt right at our kitchen table, at the gas pump, and even the spiritual life of many people. However important and urgent as external peace impels me to do a sermon, I restrain the urge to preach on external peace and justice and choose to reflect on the internal peace and justice the triune God provides.

Unchristian people work to resolve their sufferings and self-seek their peace and justice applying their own wisdom, maneuvers, and corruption, and they do so in the absence of the triune God. I have tried to solve my issues and tried to live peacefully outside the realm of the triune God. Honestly, on several attempts I have ended up failing, resorting to self-hate, and verging on self-injury. This is what happens to others who attempt to live their lives outside the realm of God.

The peace the triune God provide is incomparable—it is healing, and it promises permanent results. The triune God created us, and offered his only Son to redeem us, and ultimately the Holy Spirit to guide us. We do not deserve what God does for us in Jesus who died to repair the God - human relationship damaged by evil influences of human thinking. Jesus' voluntary walking to the cross implored God to adopt us and make us along with him the workers in the reign of God. God graciously adopted us and created a lasting peace for which we should be forever grateful. God's peace in us is beyond our understanding.

Another work of the Holy Spirit is to offer endurance in our time of suffering. When St Paul wrote to the Roman church, it was facing trials and suffering during the reign of Emperor Claudius who had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. The evacuation meant that anyone associating with Christianity was considered a Jew and thus lost rights to own property. This suffering had no limit, yet most Christians refused to deny their faith. Most historians say it was through God's grace that the church survived the emperor's onslaught. Christians are not promised free life without suffering. We shall face trials and suffering even more than others. Our suffering may arise from cultural differences, may be inflicted by members of your own family, or may be caused by a neighbor or a friend. This suffering can affect one emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

During the time of suffering, people seek help from counselors, therapists, physicians, and psychologists, or from their wise friends. These are ways the secular world has created to deal with suffering. Since we are a part of the world, we benefit in utilizing these resources.

But Christians have another means available to us during times of suffering—the Holy Spirit, our counselor and helper. God desires that we remain focused and seek His Spirit to rescue us. When we go through suffering, God the Holy Spirit will offer us solutions. The Holy Spirit rescued the church from the great tribulations (suffering) of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. God the Holy Spirit saved the Roman Christians, and the city of Rome became the center of world Christianity from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. And still to this day, Rome remains the center of the Roman Catholic Church. St Paul is right that suffering brings endurance and endurance produces excellent character. Simply stated, suffering matures our faith, and we overcome the suffering through our faith.

Like most of you, I have suffered bouts of illness and have had issues threatening my life. During these trials, I pray to remain focused on the promises of God that never fails. God reminds me, “I will be with you until the end of time”. Do you feel the same? When you face your trials, how do you deal with them? Do you feel closer to the triune God, and especially God the Holy Spirit? Do you seek that Spirit’s presence to accompany you in your suffering?

For me, God’s Holy Spirit becomes another person to consult with, to turn to, to seek guidance from, and to feel supported and comforted by. It is a conscience decision I have taken to stay in the presence of the Holy Spirit from morning till evening. Often, I take a few minutes after an event or visit to check on how my relationship with the Holy Spirit is going. After a brief reflection I turn to prayers, or a memorized Bible verse. I allow the Holy Spirit to guide and advocate for me during suffering and hang on to the hope that something good will come out of it.

I do my utmost to avoid negative thoughts to lead me. Often, negative thoughts discourage a hopeful person to misinterpret the situation as unmanageable. Negative thoughts lead to self-pity and to a blame game. A torrent of thoughts and questions flows out—what will happen, and why me and why at this time?! These questions lead us to attempt to find answers, often avoiding God’s Spirit and rushing to solve our issues, causing further suffering on our own.

I do not let my mind wonder away from God’s Spirit. During suffering I can have more questions than answers. I can think of several ways the secular world has created to solve the suffering and have even attempted them. But when I settle on God’s Spirit and wait in pain to experience God’s saving grace, I experience inner peace in the midst of suffering. Today’s reading is a reminder to us to patiently work with the Holy Spirit and endure the suffering despite the pain until we get a relieving solution!

I know suffering comes in difference types and shapes, including the physical pain most of us go through. I have had my own pain from accidents, death of beloved parents, and failure of dreams and plans, to name just a few. I have been in the pit,

wallowing in pain and despair. I have experienced pains and misery inflicted by other Christians, close friends, and colleagues. I am sure some of you may share this experience with me. Yet I have not wavered from God's Spirit. The Church promotes justice in and out of season. When people called Christians are not just, that impairs our character that is formed out of our endurance during sufferings.

In this reading, St Paul reminds us endurance produces character, another work of the Holy Spirit. When I checked the online definition of the term character, I found out it means "the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual." When we endure suffering the Holy Spirit teaches us better ways of solving problems, and how the outcome affects our moral life. Christian moral qualities make us distinct individuals. We are people of hope, and that hope shall never disappoint us. The Holy Spirit pours into our hearts the moral qualities of love and truth. This something to think about.

May we continue to fellowship with God's Spirit and reap the benefits the Spirit offers. May we be steadfast, committed to be faithful to the end. The triune God through the Holy Spirit is calling us into a mutual relationship of love, service, sacrifice and dependence. I conclude by asking you to look at the images of the clipped hands hanging in the roof of our church, these hands represent the fire the Holy spirit and promises continued horizontal and vertical relationships. May we allow God's spirit to lead us. Amen