

## **Sermon for June 16, 2019**

### **Endurance**

#### **Acts 5:1-5**

#### **The Reverend Roger Pancost**

A couple of months ago, following a memorial service here at the church, Jim Hohmeyer introduced me to a friend from Rotary. Some of you may know Harry Grether. He was a teacher and school administrator for many years.

During our conversation it was mentioned that Harry has written a book that he titled, Lessons from an Imperfect World. Harry shared that he has given copies of his book to hundreds of people over the years. He then told me that he had copies in his car and would bring one to me. When he returned from the parking lot he graciously autographed my copy. I thanked him for his gift and went on with the responsibilities of my day.

It wasn't until a few weeks later that I picked up Mr. Grether's book and began reading. I learned that his inspiration for writing this book came from journeying with his daughter, Denise, who was diagnosed with cancer.

In a chapter that he titled, "...about courage" Mr. Grether reflects on a time in which his daughter was going through her third major surgery in less than four years. These surgeries had been performed to remove cancerous tumors or cancer-related growths that had persisted after previous surgeries and several rounds of chemotherapy. Throughout these surgeries Denise had maintained her hope and continued to work as an electronics engineer.

After this surgery the surgeon told the family that he had removed a significant amount of the tumorous growth but that a significant amount of damage had been done to her spinal cord. He was certain that Denise would never walk again.

Despite the surgeon's prediction, Denise was determined to walk again and diligently worked hard at countless physical therapy appointments. A year later Denise was invited to serve as maid of honor at her sister's wedding. In reflecting on that experience, Mr. Grether writes,

"Denise took her place as maid of honor in her wheel chair. Later, at the reception, with her braces and (her husband) Gregg's support, she stood and they

danced together. Many at the reception watched with joy. Most of us will never forget that evening.”

Mr. Grether goes on to share, “In the months ahead, her ability to walk continued to progress. Soon the wheelchair was put into a storage unit near the apartment. Not long after that, the braces were set aside because they were no longer needed.”

Sadly, in the midst of these wonderful developments, the cancer continued to take its course. Mr. Grether writes,

“As she continued to fight, Denise complained very little and never visibly displayed fear. She was always filled with hope. She was determined and convinced that she would beat her cancer. She apologized for the fact that her illness was causing so much sadness and pain to those around her. In fact, the last time we cried together, I told her how sorry I was to be so helpless on her behalf.” She said, “What bothers me the most is not this crazy disease, but how much it is affecting our family and friends.”

Mr. Grether concludes his chapter on courage saying,

“Denise and Gregg lived in their new home for about two years before she died peacefully there. Much of her spirit, love, courage, and memory live on in this book.” (Lessons From an Imperfect World, Harry J. Grether, 2005)

In this morning’s reading from Romans we hear the Apostle Paul speaking of courage and hope. Strengthened by his relationship with God, through Christ, Paul shares words of encouragement with the members of the church in Rome. He writes,

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

In reflecting on these words of encouragement the Reverend Richard Sheffield writes, “The letter to Rome, written toward the end of Paul’s life and ministry, can be viewed as a summary of what he had learned of faith and hope and love through his own suffering. He had suffered much and would again before his death a few years later in Rome. His “formula” for hope describes what he learned

from his pain – not that suffering is desirable or to be pursued, or to be wished on anyone, but that when pain comes, and it will, denial and avoidance are a “waste.” Life and health, hope, can come, even in the midst of suffering, out of our learning to endure and growing in character, says Paul.”

(Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3, page 41)

Reverend Sheffield reminds us that in each of our lives there will be times of suffering. These times of suffering may involve personal issues, or our concern about other people.

Paul found hope in his belief that God’s grace was always with him. He trusted that there was nothing that could separate him from the love of God. Paul’s faith gave him the strength to endure the difficulties of life. Paul encourages the members of the church in Rome, and all of us, to have this same hope.

Although Paul does not mention it in this section of his letter to the Romans, he also found strength in his relationship with other people. Throughout his journeys Paul had traveling companions who offered support.

One of the most powerful ways that any of us experience the grace of God is through the loving care of other people. As each of us faces difficulties in our lives we can turn to the other people in the church for support and encouragement. This involves trusting other people enough to share our struggles with them. It also means responding to these struggles with compassionate care. Harry Grether writes, “One of the most important reasons we are here is to be of help to one another.”

As the Grether family knows, things don’t always turn out the way we want them to. There are times in which the people we love don’t recover from an illness. Or, they continue to face the challenges associated with a particular disease.

Even though we live in an imperfect world, we find hope in the promise that we do not face such difficulties alone. God’s love surrounds us, and we have people who support us.

I am grateful to the Apostle Paul and to Harry Grether for sharing these words of hope with us. Amen.

