Some of the most elegant portions of the Book of Romans are found in this 5th chapter. As Paul continues to outline his arguments in this theological treatise, he reflects on human life lived in relation to Jesus Christ. Immediately, he shares that if we have been justified – that is, having entered into a relationship with Christ – we have peace. Peace. The word seems almost beyond us when we consider the turmoil of our world. Civil unrest, war, violence, and brutality hardly point us toward a state of peace. In fact, most of us are praying for peace in the midst of the difficulties we are experiencing in our county and throughout the world. But Paul asserts, and the Bible claims, that as those who are followers of Jesus, we have peace.

Clearly, this peace is something much deeper than a temporal sense of calm or assurance that accompanies times that are absence of conflict. This peace is found in a reality that exists in spite of unrest that occurs from time to time. This peace is not subject to change; this peace is not conditional. This peace gives us access to the grace of God and in God we find our hope – a certain hope, secure, in and through Jesus Christ.

I don’t know about you, but Paul challenges me when he considers suffering as a reason for rejoicing. I don’t like to suffer. Most people I know do not like to suffer. Why exercise when we can take a weight loss pill? Why change my diet if I can just get a prescription? Why deny myself if I really want something? Our world conditions us not for sacrifice but for indulgence. We often resist discipline.

When life events create a sense of suffering in our lives, those times are not times we consider rejoicing. When a death occurs, when a job is lost, when hardship presents, we tend not to think of these moments as a time to rejoice. But again, Paul speaks to something deeper than our immediate feelings – which are subject to change – and reminds us of a claim that has been placed on us by Christ, through the love of God and the Holy Spirit that lives in us – that sustains us and gives us hope in all things.

The progression of the passage: that suffering leads to endurance and endurance produces character, and character leads to hope, is one of the most beautiful descriptions of life in the faith. It is captures the reality of the difficulties of life while also acknowledging that a key quality of the Christian faith is perseverance.

I like to run. I enjoy running. I jokingly said that while I was a district superintendent, I really enjoyed running because I never had an SPR Committee that wanted to go for a run with me. Running is my time, it’s quiet. I don’t listen to music. I don’t run with others. I run by myself to be by myself and during the time that I am running, I listen. I seek clarity. I need to run to maintain a sense of peace in my own life.
I enjoy long distance running. I’ve completed 15K’s, half and full marathons. One afternoon, while running in my neighborhood, a teenager asked me how I could run that far. My reply to him was rather simple, “Put one foot in front of the other and don’t quit.”

Though the circumstances of life can change in an instant, the Christian is given a sense of peace and a hope that is secure in Christ and we can continue in this life because of the certainty that Jesus gives us.

It is even more remarkable, when we press further into passage and give consideration to who we are in the eyes of God – namely sinners in need of a Savior. God loves us and, even in our sin, Christ died for us. In this salvation, we are spared the wrath of God and we are reconciled.

We are given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). With all of the brokenness in our families, our churches, our communities, our cities, and beyond, where might we be agents of this reconciliation, bearing witness to the love of God that we have experienced in our own lives? Reconciliation is hard work. God knows this because God sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to die, that through his suffering and death, we might be saved, and because we are saved, we might find peace, grace, love, and enduring hope. Through this lens, reconciliation is worth the effort. The key is to persevere – keep on keeping on.

I invite you this week to give consideration to where you might participate in the work of reconciliation in your community. Is there some small thing that you can do that would help to encourage another person or group to know that there is hope, that they are loved? Is there something your class can do to reach out to those who are thinking of throwing in the towel, ready to quit? Is there a way to make a difference in the lives of those who are grieving, who are troubled, who are broken, so that they might experience a sense of peace that goes beyond their current circumstances? Take on the ministry of reconciliation. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with YOU.