Last week’s sermon invited us to “Make a Wish” for our experience of church. That is not a challenge to be taken up lightly, even if the image of blowing out candles on a birthday cake fit neatly with the notion of Pentecost being the church’s “birthday” by the act of the Holy Spirit bringing about community.

Today’s wish, as some of you may know, is for Pastor Tim, here, to keep his word and REALLY keep the promise of keeping this sermon brief, so we can include all the wonderful celebrations of today – our dads, grads, and appreciations – and still manage to wrap up Trinity Sunday before decorate the church for Advent!

If last week drew our attention to a wish, today’s passage from Romans offers us a multitude of words to consider.

*Justified...Faith...Grace...Suffering...Endurance...Character...*

These five verses could be a sermon series unto themselves.
These five verses provide us elements of past, present, and future. Paul opens reminding us what has already happened: we are justified. That’s already done – in the books: in what Jesus accomplished for us, we obtained access to grace.

In that grace we stand: present tense. That wording, IN which we stand, gives us the sense that God’s grace is a place of being IN GOD’S PRESENCE.

So, then, what in these verses speaks of the future? If we appreciate that repeating words in Scripture is intentional to get us to notice key points, it is not lost on us that Paul uses the word hope not once, not twice, but three times in these five verses. Hope projects us from the present moment out into the future.

This biblical notion of hope, however, is not some casual, whimsical aspiration, like, “I hope it’s sunny tomorrow,” or “I hope my team wins tonight.” Those are situations where we can say what we want to happen, but we really don’t know what WILL happen.
The type of hope Paul preaches somehow rolls past, present, and future into one: it says, “We know already, even if we have not really and fully experienced it just yet.”

As if to make the point, Paul writes this line that, at first glance, seems insensitive, to put it mildly. BOAST in... sufferings? Really? Perhaps a more expressive translation encourages us to REJOICE in our sufferings, yet even that makes us cringe if we resist rushing past the verse.

REJOICE? In SUFFERINGS? This is one of those risky verses. More bluntly, it is a dangerous verse. How often do pastors, or church members, even well-intentioned ones, make this the biblical equivalent of something along the lines of: “God doesn’t give you anything you can’t handle.”

Easily distorted, Paul’s words can be twisted into a damaging message that someone’s pain is their fault or that God wants them to suffer.

Today the church celebrates Trinity Sunday of God as Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit. That may be the mystery of doctrine. These verses also give us a window into the mystery of what it is to be human: real life is hard...but we have hope.
In the Trinity, God shows us what it is to be in community. In the past, present, and future of being justified in grace for hope, we enjoy the restored relationship with God and one another.

God knows life is hard. God knows first-hand what suffering is. Our eternal hope is that when we struggle, God walks with us.

That is true wherever we are in life. The sufferings, the challenges, the pressures may be ending at a familiar school and starting in a new place, with new people. It may be the wonders and worries of being a parent, the wonders and worries of which seem to be renewed each time our kids reach a new stage of development. It may be the adjustments and changes that come with aging. It may be navigating the responsibilities of being an adult child of an elderly parent.

All those are real. Paul is not avoiding the truth of any of that. Instead, Paul writes practical words. In the moment. We know already what we have not yet fully seen or understood: through Jesus Christ, we are forgiven now for new life...NOW.

As we are faithful, we discover our God is faithful. Our God is present and at work in the midst of all of life’s twists and turns.
That is the type of hope Paul describes. That is the hope unique to our Christian life.

Christian hope is not a maybe. Not a possibility. Christian hope is a certainty, even and especially when all indications may seem on the surface to be telling us just the opposite.

The 20\textsuperscript{th} Century theologian Jurgen Moltmann was the champion of what he called the Theology of Hope. Central to our Christian faith and Christian calling, the hope of God assures us that God is not finished with this world. Both already and not yet, God’s hope calls to us from the future, a future for which we do not merely passively wait. In the now, we embrace the struggles and challenges, partnering with God’s purposes, responding to God’s invitation to get involved where we can to make the world a better place.

The \textit{eternal hope that springs from Paul’s words} and into our very lives is more than a maybe. More than a possibility. Christian hope is having the confident expectation of God’s love. In the living of these days, mysterious and uncertain as it may seem, we are able to trust, to be patient, to feel secure.