1Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 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. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 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.

The Sunday after Pentecost is traditionally Trinity Sunday. You may have noticed that the liturgy, the prayers and hymns, surrounding the sermon today are images of the Trinity, God in Three Persons, Creating Redeeming God, Jesus the Christ, crucified and risen savior, and Holy Spirit, mover and shaker, comforter and sustainer. I understand the mystery of God expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity best in image rather than theological and philosophical construct, as important as those things are. I often think of the Trinity as a circle of continuously generating love – more of a verb than a noun. More communing that community. This week through the reading of our passage from Romans I have been pondering the Trinity as a house. A home for the Life that happens in the family of God.

Remember that old nursery rhyme story, “This is the House that Jack Built.”

This is the house that Jack built.
This is the cheese that lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the rat that ate the cheese that lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the cat that caught the rat that ate the cheese that lay in the house that Jack built….."

On and on it goes until we have a young man all tattered and torn who is married to a young woman all forlorn by a priest all shaven and shorn and a farmer sowing corn and a rooster crowing in the morn…. Remember?

In the passage we heard from Paul's letter we experience a similar, lyrical rhythm. ...suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope..” It builds to a lovely climax with and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit …”

In and around and about Jack's house a lot is happening. There’s the story of the cheese and the rat and cat and dog. And the story of the maid and the man and the priest that marries them. And the story of the farmer and the corn and the rooster who wakes him up. Life is happening! Somehow no matter what happens the house is the center… it all comes back to the house.

In and around the struggling house church in Rome that Paul was writing to all kinds of Life was Happening. Jewish and Gentiles followers of Christ were working through conflicts over traditions and rites in their new faith. They were
creating a new culture of faith in a social context hostile to them as they proclaimed Jesus the Christ as Lord rather than Caesar. At times their lives were in danger. Their faith was constantly tested and they didn’t know how many Jewish laws were necessary to maintain in order to live right with God, how many Gentile followers should be asked to maintain. And in the meantime, they were just trying to maintain Christian community, feed the poor, tend to the sick, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, worship God, study and learn.

**All kind of Life is Happening here in our faith community.** We, too, are trying to maintain Christian community, feed the poor, tend to the sick, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, worship God, study and learn the faith. We come from so many different Christian traditions that I often wonder if we could benefit from the techniques of interfaith dialogue to understand one another better. We join together in the traditions and rites of the United Church of Christ, yet if you were to take a poll on our views of - say the doctrine of the Trinity and its importance to our faith – you would find them hugely diversified. Triune God is central for my image of God...don’t know that I think about it or need it so much....Only pray to God...Jesus is central for me...Love the movement of the Spirit...on and on...Meanwhile Life is Happening for better and for not-so-good sometimes! For better and for tougher.

Paul says to all of us – the church in 1st century Rome and the church in 21st century Fort Collins - as we are in the midst of Life Happening ... since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus the Christ and we stand, we live in a situation of grace, in the midst of grace. Deep Breath! Which is so amazing that we can literally boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. Sharing the glory of God....

Boasting in Paul’s world was not about shallow bragging. Boasting was a formal Greek rhetorical manner of speech that exuded utter confidence. Since we are justified by faith we can have utter confidence and can place our hope in sharing in God’s glory. What could sharing God’s glory be? Could we understand it through the image of living fully in God’s house of love? The love of God made up of the love we know as Father/Mother, as a sustaining parent who created the world and set us in it. The love we know as Jesus, God-with-us in human form experiencing Life Happening as it happens to us and yet able to live so fully in the ways of God that he underwent suffering, death and resurrection. The love we know as Holy Spirit the power and force, the creativity and comfort of God always available to us.

Since we are justified by faith we know, we have access to the peace and grace of God as we live – and I don’t mean this theoretically or speculatively.....as we live in God’s House of Love we not only know peace and grace, writes Paul, but we can have confidence in suffering...knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, hope that does not disappoint us. .....since we are justified by faith.

**Now wait a minute! That is a pretty big assumption.** That is not always my experience of suffering when Life Happens....it is yours? Have you always found that suffering actually produces endurance and endurance character and character hope? Wait a minute, Paul! Suffering stinks! And its hard to endure! And do we have to suffer to build our characters? And this hope thing? Is that about pie in the sky unrealistic wishing? What’s up here? Since we are justified by faith.....
What does it mean to be “justified by faith.”

- **To justify: “a good reason for something or some action.”** Is it enough to know that Jesus, his life, teachings, suffering, death and resurrection, are a good reason to have faith, to trust, and then faith brings us God’s peace and grace so we can deal with the suffering of life? Maybe...sometimes.

- **To justify: “to position (text) so that the edges form a straight line.** You know that little button you click on in Microsoft word that lines up the text in a perfect box shape. You justify...line up....the text. I love that button. It’s a wonder for someone who is continually trying to remember where she put her glasses. One top of her head, in her pocket. Someone who’s desk is never really “justified”...lots of piles of books and papers. Always looking for her keys...

- **Using our house image we know that to build a house the corners of the foundation and the rooms need to be squared....justified with one another, lined up in perfect 90 degree angles, with another to build strong, straight walls.** Is it enough to know that Jesus, his life, teachings, suffering, death and resurrection line us up with God, put us in line with God’s goodness and righteousness so we can deal with the suffering of life? Sometimes....maybe.

- **To justify: justified by faith....how can we understand this phrase better?**

  **Ever try to draw a circle free hand?** Is it perfect? Never! No matter how hard we try we cannot draw a perfect circle free hand. Some of us who are artists or architects might some close. But not perfect. What do you need to draw a perfect circle? A center point. Right. You need a compass or at least two pencils with a string or you can even use your ring finger to make the center point and then move the paper around it to draw the circle. Whatever you use....you need a center point. And then the outer edge of your circle will be equidistant from the center. All the way around. In a manner of speaking the edges will be justified....lined up because of their relationship with the center.

  **It seems to me that Paul is saying to the struggling, squabbling house church in Rome and to us over 2000 years late in our faith community that still can be prone to struggle and squabble, challenge and doubt....Paul is saying...** When the God we know in Jesus the Christ is the center of all we are and all we do, we can draw the true and balanced circle of our lives, individually and communally.

  **Life Happens and the circles of our lives get pretty lumpy and out of balance, don’t they?** When Life Happens....and we know it will!....if we are justified in our faith, if the God we know in Jesus is at the center, we will stand in the circle of God’s love and peace and grace. We will live in God’s House of Love...in the midst of that love that comes in threes. When suffering comes...and it does....we will be able to endure because our life will be built in a circle of love, in God’s house of love. Then will our endurance in the midst of suffering will produce new character, new growth, new strength. And this new character, growth and strength will give us hope
that is solid. It will not be wishful thinking...it will be grounded in the center, in God. This is hope that will not disappoint because it is God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Justified by faith, we build our lives around the center point of God in Christ Jesus through the strong, animating love God in the Holy Spirit. Just as all kinds of life happens in and around ole Jack's house, our lives as Christians happen in and around the house of Love that God builds and reveals to us as Creator, Christ and Spirit. Justified in faith we live in peace, grace and hope no matter what our circumstances because the center point is true. It is the Source of all Life. Amen.