

June 22, 2014
Pentecost 3

"Justified by Faith"

ROMANS 3:21-25, 27-28

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. ²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

The front cover of your bulletin has the words that define who you are as a Christian. You are someone who has been "justified by faith." Justified means "declared not guilty." You are declared not guilty before God through Christ, not through faith in yourself, not through faith in your feelings and not through faith in your performance. Faith in self leads to failure. Faith in Christ leads to eternal salvation.

What is faith? If I open this bottle of water, I have faith or trust that the people who put this water into this bottle made it safe for me to drink. When I fly in an airplane as I did about two weeks ago, I had faith or trust that the pilot and the crew would take me safely from San Luis Obispo to Phoenix. Yes, I have faith and confidence that the Lord will hear my prayers to help us with our Bible camp which starts tomorrow at 9:00 AM.

The most important question of life facing every human being ever born into this world is this: "Where are you putting your faith to be forgiven of your sin and accepted by God?" Is it in yourself? Then you have no hope. If it is in Christ alone then you can be sure of your forgiveness, sure of God's love for you and sure of where you will be when you die.

Faith in my righteousness fails me

The first three chapters of Romans shatter all hope of putting faith in yourself for your salvation. These chapters tell us the whole world is like a nest of rotten eggs that curious boys love to smash on the ground and release a terrible odor. Tell me. Was it not fun to do this with your cousins when you found a nest of abandoned eggs hidden away in the hayloft?

The righteousness we find in ourselves that is like a nest of rotten eggs. It is totally unacceptable to God. We desperately need a righteousness outside of ourselves as we hear in the words we just read to you. "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Sin is not just doing the really bad things that hurt other people, it is anything that falls short of God's glory or his perfection.

As some of you know we have Bible lessons once or twice a month with the children in the Transitional Shelter. One time we asked the question, "Have you ever sinned?" Some of the children said "Yes" and others said, "No." If our definition of sin is limited only to the really bad things people do such as killing, robbing banks and hating, then we might be able to say, "Yes, I have never sinned." However because sin includes even bad thoughts about other people, or not putting the Lord first in our lives, or failing to help people, or being too greedy for money, or even failing to pray for them as we should, then we must admit, "Yes, I have sinned." If idolatry is limited only to worshipping objects of wood and stone, then I have not broken the first commandment that forbids me to have idols. However, if idolatry is allowing what is going on in my life, whether good or bad, to become more important than God, then I have broken the very first commandment God has given me.

The Greek word used here for sin is "amartano." It means to miss the mark. It means falling short of God's glory and his perfection. When I was a child we made bows out of tree branches and arrows out of cedar shingles. We even glued chicken feathers to the arrows to make them fly straight, but they did not. Then my father bought us a bow and arrows such as this. We even took archery lessons, but still we seldom hit the bull's eye on the target. Missing the mark does not mean shooting arrows wildly all over the neighborhood. It means failing to hit the bull's eye every time. That is why this chapter of Romans says, "There is no one righteous, not even one."

It says, "There is no difference, for all have sinned." That means it is not just the young people who sin, but also the old people. Is not just the bad people who sin, it is even the nice people. Just as there is no one on this earth who can jump across the Grand Canyon, even the best athletes in the world, there is no one who can measure up to God's glory. My righteousness fails me because it does not measure up to God's righteousness.

What a blessing it is to have God's Word assure us this morning that there is a righteousness available for us that does not involve our failed keeping of the law. Romans 3 says that this righteousness comes from God himself and it was testified to by the Law and the Prophets. After Adam and Eve fell into sin and lost their perfection God promised the blessing of a seed from the woman who would crush the devil's power. God promised a descendant to Abraham who would bless the whole world. Abraham believed that his God would provide him with a righteousness and perfection he could not find in himself. One of the most amazing verses in Scripture says that Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Martin Luther fondly called this righteousness that comes from God and is given to us as free gift an "alien righteousness." It comes from a whole different place than our daily struggles in life to improve ourselves. It comes from the righteousness God provides you and me in Jesus his Son. It is a righteousness that is pure and perfect and holy. It cost us nothing.

Faith in Jesus' righteousness saves me

Now we hear of this righteousness we have in Christ. It says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But then it goes on to say, "All are justified freely by his grace

through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.” The word “justify” as it is used here is a judicial or forensic term that means “declared not guilty.” To be justified before God means “Just as if you never sinned.” Or as someone has said, “just right.”

There are no resources in me or in anyone else that make us “just right” with God. Even my best thoughts and best efforts cannot make me “just right” but Jesus can. We are justified freely, without any cost to us, by the redemption we have in Christ Jesus. If you stop at the market and fill your shopping cart with groceries, you just can’t walk out the door without paying. If you fill your life with sin you cannot stand before God in the final judgment without paying. Jesus paid the price for you with his blood that was shed for you on the cross, real blood, in real time, in a real place with the body of a real man who was also God. Isaiah 53 says, “The punishment for our peace was on him and with his wounds we are healed.”

Our verses tell us more about this source of our forgiveness and peace with God. “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.” Notice it says that our God, our heavenly Father gave us His Son and presented Him as sacrifice of atonement for us. Watch the Old Testament high priest sprinkle the blood of a goat on the golden lid of the ark of the covenant on the great Day of Atonement. It pictured the blood of Jesus that would be shed for us on the cross. Our heavenly Father kept his promise to offer his Son for us. “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”

It is this sacrifice of atonement that Jesus made for us that allows our heavenly Father to justify us or declare us not guilty in his sight. Recall the words of the *Small Catechism*. “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.”

Now you can say with fully confidence, “I know my sin is forgiven, I know I have peace with God, I know where I am going when I die, I know that God loves me.” This is not boasting in yourself. This is boasting in Christ and what he has done for us.

Romans 3 says, “Where then is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? on that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” When a goal is scored in World Cup soccer, the person who scores the goal runs around in celebration or slides along the grass. He is mobbed by his team mates. The crowd goes wild and cheers. So we celebrate the victory that Jesus won for us. We celebrate the faith that allows us to believe that this is all real. We celebrate being justified by faith.

When you came to worship this morning you certainly noticed that we are preparing for another Star Bible Camp. What do we want for the children who come to us? Surely we want to offer them a place where they can enjoy the crafts, the singing, the outdoor games and meeting new friends. We want them to learn more of God’s Word. What we want above everything is for them to know and believe they are God’s dear children through Jesus. We want them to know that they are forgiven through Jesus. Please keep this Bible camp in your prayers. Pray specifically that we might faithfully plant the seed of God’s Word in their lives and that it will continue to grow throughout their lives so that

they will believe they are justified by faith in Christ alone. Amen.

Jesus, your blood and righteousness

My beauty are, my glorious dress;

Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed,

With joy shall I lift up my head.