

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The Third Sunday of Lent
Saturday, March 19, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, March 20, 2011 at 8:00 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“Your Faith is Counted as Righteousness”

Rom. 4:1-8, 13-17

Throughout the Epiphany Season and so far this Lenten Season, one common, recurring theme has been that we, like Abraham, have had our faith counted to us as righteousness. This is the hallmark of our life in Christ. We have this magnificent unearned honor to be declared righteous by God.

And God willingly proclaims this. He publicly announces this at our Baptism. He publicly announces this by inviting us to gather at His table. Remember that, in the ancient world, being invited to eat at someone’s table was no small thing. The host was publicly announcing that not only were there no difficulties in your relationship, but that you were considered as close and as dear as any blood member of the family.

Because of our faith in what Christ has done for us by fulfilling the law, God has forgiven all our sins and pronounced us to be in a totally right relationship with Him. Christ took our sin upon Himself and allowed us to be credited with His righteousness. It is truly the best deal we could ever make.

Once again, we see the gracious nature of our God. Even a

person like the Samaritan woman at the well, (who we will hear about in next week's Gospel lesson -- the disciples could not believe Jesus was speaking to her), by God's grace through faith, she can drink of that living water which we so often take for granted.

We hear Paul in his letter to the Romans punctuating what I said last week – that Christ came to fulfill the Law. Christ was here to suffer and be tempted in every way that we suffer and are tempted. He suffered more than any of us could imagine, not only the physical pain of being nailed to the cross, but also having the burden of carrying all the sins of the world on His shoulders. It was necessary that He did this because the “Law brings wrath.” God's Law points its finger of guilt and says you are deserving of death and hell. And the Law must be satisfied.

In our Thursday morning Bible Class, we came across a great word this last week: propitiation. The great Lutheran question was asked, “What does this mean?” It means to “appease”. Christ came to appease the wrath of God. He placed Himself between us and judgment of the Law. He took our punishment and fulfilled the Law for us. And now, as Paul says, “where there is no Law there is no transgression.” Because there is no guilt. This is the essence of what it means to be forgiven.

Christ came to fulfill the Law because it is impossible for us to be justified by what we do. If we have to work out our own righteousness, we are all in a lot of trouble, because even breaking the least of God's

commandments brings with it a condemnation that, as Jesus says, “it would be better for that person to have a millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea.”

If our faith is in our own works, if we say to ourselves, “I’m a pretty good guy, at least I am certainly better than most of you,” then we need to take a longer look at Paul’s words. He says, Our God “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

If anyone ever says to you that their good works have made them right with God, tell them you can’t agree with that, but also tell them that you will acknowledge they are a pretty good person for being dead – and for being someone who does not really exist -- in the sight of God.

We dare not ever forget that the sinful mind is hostile to God. We are born “blind, dead, enemies of God.” Apart from God we can do no good thing. Scripture and our confessions of faith repeatedly bring us back to the faith of Abraham. He wasn’t right with God because he was such a great guy. Not even Abraham could make the claim of having done enough in this life to merit entrance into heaven.

God has given “life to the dead and has called into existence the things that do not exist.” Apart from our Lord, we are empty. We are formless and void. There is nothing in us or about us of value. God should look upon us with the greater disdain than the disciples do the Samaritan women at the well. (As I said, we will check that out next week.)

Today, we again bow before our Lord and thank Him for the

unearned honor of, not only having life in this world, but we are declared righteous in His sight. And having been born again by water and the Spirit, though you are nothing on your own, you are called a beloved child of God.

God willingly and publicly announces that you are His child. And because of the faith created in you, He has done for you what the Law could not do. The Law can declare you to be not guilty. But like God did for Abraham, He has counted your faith in Him as righteousness. Amen.