

# “Your Faith is Counted as Righteousness”

Romans 4:1-8, 13-17

In our Sunday morning Bible class, we are currently going through Paul’s letter to the Romans. We are just about up to our text for today. Throughout this portion of the letter, one common, recurring theme has been that we have no hope for salvation by keeping the law. Christ and Christ alone has brought us out of the depths of sin and judgment we deserve. And now we hear those beautiful words that, like Abraham, our faith is counted to us as righteousness. This is the hallmark of our life in Christ. We have this magnificent unearned honor, since Christ has fulfilled the Law for us, we are now 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 is a common theme in Scripture – 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 Sunday morning Bible Class, we came across a great word last week in Romans chapter 3: propitiation. The great Lutheran question was asked, “What does this mean?” It means to “appease”. Christ came to appease, to satisfy the wrath of God. Literally, He soaks up 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 the people out there," or if we say, "God is said to be loving and merciful, He certainly wouldn't judge me", 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, or (what I hear more often) that they are hopeful they can make it into heaven (with how they live their life being the determining factor), and they are usually pretty confident that God isn't going to judge them – after all, there are so many people who do worse things than I do.

If you are feeling bold, tell them you highly doubt that. Especially if that person is irregular in coming to receive God's Word and Sacrament, call their salvation into question – not to be mean or sarcastic. Sincerely ask them on what they are basing their hope. If it is on their own works, being a good person (or at least being a better person than most), be firm with them and tell them that counts as nothing in the eyes of God.

If they say they trust in Christ alone for salvation, ask them why gathering with the people of God and participating in the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament (of which He says "Do this in remembrance of Me"); ask them why they place such little value on what we receive here if this is

truly where you place your faith and trust. These are questions that have eternal consequences.

We dare not ever forget that the sinful mind is hostile to God. Spiritually, 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. There is no hope for us outside of Christ. God should look upon us with greater disdain than the disciples do the Samaritan women at the well. (As I said, we will check that out next week.)

But He chose to love us, and to send His Son to shield us from the wrath and judgment of the Law. 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 like God did for Abraham, He has counted your faith as righteousness. Amen.