

Second Sunday after Pentecost  
 June 2, 2012  
 Romans 3:21-25a, 27-28

In Christ Jesus, who is our righteousness, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This morning we are beginning a summer-long study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. This is one of, if not the, most important letter from the pen of the Apostle Paul through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Luther said this of Romans: "It is the chief book of the New Testament and the purest Gospel. It would be quite proper for a Christian not only to know it by heart word for word, but also daily to use it as daily bread for the soul; for you can never read and study it too much and too well. The more one uses it, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."

It is a doctrinal book, but not a dry book of doctrine! This letter and especially our text this morning summarizes the doctrine of justification by grace through faith---"the doctrine upon which the Christian Church stands or falls."

Paul wrote this letter 25 years after Pentecost. No one knows who founded the church in Rome. It wasn't Paul and contrary to the Catholic Church's teaching, it wasn't Peter either. It was probably founded by unknown Jewish and proselyte Gentile people who returned from Jerusalem after Pentecost, having been converted to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. By the time Paul wrote this letter the congregation was quite large and well known.

The verses of our text begin the second part of Paul's letter. In the previous portion (chapters 1-2 and the first half of 3) Paul's emphasis is that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, are guilty before God and deserving of damnation. Paul quotes Psalm 14: **THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE...THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE.** Then in the verse just before our text Paul writes: **THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW NO FLESH WILL BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT, FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.** And in verse 23 of our text he writes: **FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE; FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.**

Thankfully our text begins with these words: **BUT NOW...**

Paul has drawn for us one of the most important word pictures ever. All of mankind, every single person ever conceived is brought before the court of God. The Judge of all is seated on His throne. Before Him stands the countless billions upon billions of convicted sinners, every one of them, not one is missing; from the first Adam and Eve to the last conceived before Judgment Day, from the greatest to the least, from the nicest to the most evil. Everyone is convicted of his and her sins and stands condemned before the Almighty Creator.

There is no defense. The Law has revealed all of our sins: our indecent thoughts, unkind words, spiteful, selfish actions. God looks into our lives and sees the greed, lust, envy and discontent of our hearts and all of these ugly, inner sins are also clearly seen by our sinful actions and words toward others. No one else is to blame. We stand rightfully accused and condemned awaiting God's just decree of eternal damnation!

**BUT NOW...** Paul writes: **BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD APART FROM THE LAW IS REVEALED, BEING WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS. EVERY SINNER IS DECLARED RIGHTEOUS!**

**I: A DECLARATION COMING FROM GOD, NOT MAN!**

Under the law of God all people stand condemned. Where, then is righteousness before God to be found? How can the sinner stand before God righteous?

By nature people associate righteousness with some kind of obedience to the law. If one keeps certain rules and regulations, one can be judged as being good, acceptable, righteous. But Paul declares, this natural kind of thinking is all wrong! The righteousness that avails before God does not come from us or from within us. This righteousness comes from God and is declared by God.

Back to that courtroom scene. With shamed faces and guilty hearts we stand before God and we hear God declare, **"NOT GUILTY!** Not guilty of any and all sins, you are declared righteous in My sight!"

This is a righteousness apart from the law, apart from anything we can do or ever have done. We are utterly incapable of contributing one thing to this righteousness. And this righteousness of God has been

declared to us already in the Old Testament. As the church father Augustine wrote: “The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old is revealed in the New!”

Jeremiah called the Messiah, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS** and again **THE RIGHTEOUS BRANCH OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL**.

## **II: A DECLARATION CENTERED IN JESUS CHRIST ALONE!**

**EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, TO ALL AND ON ALL WHO BELIEVE. FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE; FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD. BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS, WHOM GOD SET FORTH AS A PROPITIATION BY HIS BLOOD, THROUGH FAITH...**

The question still needs to be asked. How can a just and holy God declare every sinner righteous? Only because of Jesus Christ. God’s declaration of righteousness upon sinful mankind is only because of Jesus’ perfect life, His suffering, death and resurrection.

God still demanded perfection and perfection has been lived by the God-Man Jesus. God still demanded the sinner’s payment of death and damnation and the payment price for our sins has been paid by that same Son of God and Son of Man. That propitiation---that satisfactory payment, that atoning sacrifice has been made. All sins, of all people, have been paid for in full.

Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:19-21: **GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES TO THEM, AND HAS COMMITTED TO US THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION. . .FOR HE MADE HIM WHO KNEW NO SIN TO BE SIN FOR US, THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.**

There is no difference in any of us. We ALL have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory of perfection, but thankfully God has freely, as a gift, without payment, by His grace—by means of His undeserved love, declared us righteous in His sight through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

That ransom payment of Christ’s shed blood has bought us back from sin, death and hell and given us full and free forgiveness of all sins.

By the word propitiation, Paul takes us back to the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant, also called the Mercy Seat. It was on this Mercy Seat that the High Priest once a year, on the great Day of Atonement sprinkled the blood of a goat that was sacrificed as a sin-offering. But that was only a type, symbol or picture of the Messiah.

Jesus, the Christ sprinkled His blood upon the cross as the vicarious atonement for our sins. He was the substitutionary payment that set things straight that made things right with God, so that we are now **AT ONE** with God, righteous in His sight.

## **III: A DECLARATION RECEIVED BY FAITH, NOT WORKS!**

**WHERE IS BOASTING THEN? IT IS EXCLUDED. BY WHAT LAW? OF WORKS? NO, BUT BY THE LAW OF FAITH. THEREFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH APART FROM THE DEEDS OF THE LAW.**

Our sinful flesh loves to boast. Boast about the smallest things — “look what I have done, look how good I have been, look how I have loved Jesus and served Him.” There is no boasting here! This free gift is given to us and we have received it, made it ours only by faith.

Faith is simply the empty hand that receives what God gives and promises to us in Christ. It clings to Christ and His Word of forgiveness, life and salvation. Faith is not a meritorious work. Faith is that trust worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that rests itself in Christ.

In our Lutheran Confessions in the Formula of Concord we read this about faith: “Faith does not justify because it is so good a work and so God-pleasing a virtue, but because it lays hold on and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy Gospel.”

This is the central teaching of the Bible. This is the heart and core of the Gospel. This is the touchstone of Lutheranism: We are saved by Grace alone, through Faith alone, which is found in Scripture alone!

As we begin the summer season and the Pentecost portion of our church year, may this truth of our Justification, of our being declared righteous by God through Jesus, ever be the surety, the guide, the anchor, the foundation for all of our thoughts, word and actions as we thank and praise our Savior God and live in service to each other motivated by our Savior’s great, sacrificial love for us.

**FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST COMPELS US, BECAUSE WE JUDGE THUS: THAT IF ONE DIED FOR ALL, THEN ALL DIED; AND HE DIED FOR ALL, THAT THOSE WHO LIVE**

**SHOULD LIVE NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR HIM WHO DIED FOR THEM  
AND ROSE AGAIN. (2 Cor. 5:14-15)**

Amen.