

In Nomine Jesu!

6th Sunday a. Trinity

June 29, 2008

Hecla

Text: Romans 3:19-28 - *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Theme: Lutheranism - Making Righteousness Known

I. Apart from law

II. From God

III. Through faith in Jesus Christ

Dear fellow sinners made clean in the blood of Jesus Christ,

What does it mean to be Lutheran? In the early days of the Reformation, there was no doubt what it meant to be Lutheran. The beliefs and teachings of the Lutherans were laid out in the Book of Concord. But today Lutheranism is viewed as one of many branches of Christianity. It is almost as if it is one the 31 flavors of ice cream at Baskin Robbins. It's all ice cream, it's just a matter of picking out which flavor you like best. So too, some leave the impression that whether your talking about Lutheran, Baptist, Catholic, or now even Mormon - just pick which flavor of Christianity you like best.

But as members of this or another Lutheran Church, do you know why you are Lutheran? Are you a Lutheran because your dad or mom was Lutheran and so you chose to stick with what worked for them? First of all, we are not Lutheran because worship a man named Martin Luther. We hold that the *teachings* that Martin Luther and his companions taught as found in the Book of Concord are a true exposition of Scripture. We do not place the teachings of the Lutheran church as being higher or more important than Scripture, but we do hold that they rightly reflect the teachings contained in Scripture. True Lutheranism teaches and upholds nothing more and nothing less than what the Holy Spirit gave to us in His Word. In fact, if you are willing, we could say that the Law and the Prophets and the Apostle Paul were Lutherans, because the teachings of true Lutheranism are only what is found in the Law, the Prophets, and the Evangelists.

When it comes to the teachings of a church there is one doctrine, one teaching that ought to be held above all others. A doctrine that if taught falsely has eternal consequences. It is the teaching of how we are saved. The question which the jailer of Philippi asked Paul and Silas, **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”** When you get right down to it, there are only two options when it comes to our salvation. Either we are saved by our own works or we are saved by the works of another. Either we are declared righteous by our own deeds or by the deeds of another. That brings us to the heart and soul of true Lutheranism - to make righteousness known. To make known that we are not righteous by the deeds of the law. To make known that our righteousness is from God, through faith in Jesus Christ. May God be praised for this most hallowed doctrine and may He ever help us to make it rightly known throughout the world!

APART FROM LAW

If you want a paycheck, what do you need to do? You work at job, right? If you want a nice house or a nice car, you have to have the money to buy it. None of us thinks that a paycheck or a house or a car will just suddenly appear one day. If you want it, you need to go work for it. Even our youngest members realize this. It should come to no surprise to us then, that all the religions of man revolve around the concept of doing good things to earn eternal life. This makes sense to natural man. Man rationalizes that if he wants to go to a “better place” after he dies, he has to work for it in this life. So he does good works. He helps the old lady across the street. He gives money to charity. He thinks that by doing so he’s earning points with God which will pay out after he dies.

This religion of man has even crept into Christian circles. One church may teach that man is saved through faith in Christ, but man has to do the work of deciding for or choosing Jesus. Another church teaches that God chose some people from eternity to be saved because He looked ahead in time and saw that they were going to be a better quality of person than the next. And as was at the time of Luther and still is today, the Roman Catholic Church teaches salvation by works.

So natural man looks to the Law, the commands of God for his marching orders to see what he must do to gain eternal life. And it is true that after giving the 10 Commandments, God said - **“You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.”** (Lev 18:5) So the Law is held out before our eyes - do these things and you shall live. Live your life such that you never put anything in your heart before God. Always having loving thoughts about your parents, your brothers and sisters, and your neighbor. Always look out for the welfare of your neighbor - even if he is your enemy. Do not desire his possessions for yourself, but rejoice for him that God has given him these things. Do these things, keep them, and live!

It almost sounds possible, doesn’t? After all, there is only 10 of them and they aren’t very long. Most of us could recite them right now. But what happens when you make a side-by-side comparison with your heart and your life with these 10 Commandments? Can you say you have kept all 10 of these perfectly? If you were to press any person who thought they could earn heaven by their works and ask them if they have done things perfectly, they would begin to use words like - “good enough” or “close enough.” Or that they “tried hard” and thought that God would be satisfied with their effort. They too recognize the same thing we recognize - we see the Law, we understand the Law, but we have failed to keep the Law perfectly.

Therefore, Paul writes in our text, *by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in*

His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. The Law does not reveal what good and loving people we are. The law does not declare us to be righteous people. By the law is the knowledge of sin. The law shows us no love. Instead the law strikes fear. The law thunders and lightning from Mt. Sinai as the Lord points to each one of us and then He says "YOU SHALL LOVE ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART." Then He says to those who fail to do so - "***Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.***" (Gal 3:10)

Paul says of the law in our text, ***Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*** The law silences every mouth, because in our heart we know God is right and we are guilty of breaking His law. This is Lutheranism - making known what Scripture makes plain - righteousness does not come from our keeping the law. For as Paul says - ***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** Let the truth of Scripture be made known - righteousness does not and cannot come from the deeds of the law!

FROM GOD

We realize that as unrighteous sinners we cannot dwell with a holy, righteous God. Sin is contrary to all that He is and all that He does. And the Law gives us the knowledge that we are sinful. Paul writes in verse 19 that all the world is guilty before God. Everyone has broken His Law and thus a sinner. There is no exception. "Close enough" is not good enough for the God of perfection.

If God has declared the whole world guilty and no one is justified in His sight, righteousness must come from out side of man. If sinners like us were to dwell eternally with God in heaven He is going to have to supply the righteousness that we lack. ***"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets."*** The righteousness from God, apart from the law, apart from works, apart from what we do, is revealed. There is a righteousness for man and it is from God Himself! Paul writes that the Law, that is the books of Moses, and the Prophets - ALL the Old Testaments witness to this righteousness from God. What Lutheranism teaches is nothing new. God spoke of it through Moses and the Prophets. Paul here writes of it here to the Romans. Martin Luther expounded on it. The Book of Concord upholds it. And true Lutheranism makes it known - the righteousness that sinners lack, God Himself supplies.

THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

As I was returning from Eau Claire on Friday night, I found that there were certain parts of the trip where my cell phone was worthless. There was nothing wrong with the cell phone itself, it's just that there was no reception in that particular area. There was no means by which I could send or receive phone calls. So at that point I had nothing more than a shiny paperweight. Without God's righteousness we are like a cell phone without reception. Try as we may we have no righteousness and the Law reveals that to us. All have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God.

But God in His incomprehensible love did something amazing. Where as all have sinned and all fall short of His glory, even so we read that all are ***justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*** Each one of us were held hostage by our own sin. We could find no way of releasing ourselves from this brutal taskmaster. Someone else needed to

free us. The ransom offered for our freedom from this terrible enemies was Jesus Christ, the beloved, righteous Son of God. God set Him forth to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. The blood of Jesus was an offering for sin. It was payment to purchase our release. Jesus died to save us. He gave His life as a ransom for all.

This release cost us nothing. It's like Paul doubles up on expressing that this redemption is free. "Freely by His grace." Freely through His free love God redeemed us. While it cost us nothing, it cost Jesus everything. He had to be everything that we failed to be. He had to keep God's Law perfectly from the beginning of His life to His last breath. Then Jesus had to earn our redemption for us by dying on the cross. His holy blood had to be shed as payment for our ransom. Jesus, true God, had to die. In dying He took our punishment on Himself. He tasted death for us. He suffered in our place. He died in our place. You see, for our UN-righteousness to be removed, Jesus had to be punished in our place.

Because Jesus did all this as our Substitute, through faith in Him His righteousness becomes our own! Sinners we are but through faith in Jesus, we are robed in Christ's righteousness. By His wounds we are healed. In anticipation of all that Jesus would do, God past over the sins of the past. Through the work of Jesus every past, present, and future believer is declared to be righteous - justified in the sight of God!

To this we conclude with Paul, ***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.*** This is the conclusion of Scripture. This is the conclusion of the Christian faith. This then is the conclusion of true Lutheranism. We are not righteous by our deeds but by the deeds of another. God has supplied the righteousness that we lack. He gives it to us freely by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This is Lutheranism - making righteousness known! May God help us to rightly know and proclaim this message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus! AMEN