

Sermon for Lent Mid 2
February 21, 2018

“Justified by Grace Alone through Faith Alone”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from the one who justifies, who is the living God. Amen.

Fellow justified people, some people don't care what God says, some people argue against what God says, some people are interested in spiritual things, some people work very hard to learn all they can about different religions, some people work very hard to obey their conscience, some people work very hard to gain a good reputation.

Some people fall for the trick that there are different levels of Christians because there are different levels of Christian living. Some Christians are more sanctified than others.

That second part is true. Some Christians come to worship nearly every single week while others come every other week and others come once a month and others come for Christmas Eve only. There's a difference in sanctification.

Some Christians say no cuss words, others say some cuss words only in particularly frustrating situations, others say cuss words around adults but not children, and others say all kinds of horrible words. There's a difference in sanctification.

Some Christians give offerings with a cheerful heart, others give with a guilty heart, others don't give at all. There's a difference in sanctification.

But there are not 1st rate Christians and 2nd rate Christians. There are not Christians who make it easy for God to love them, and other Christians who make it hard for God to love them. Christian is first and foremost a status – a Christian is a believer. There's a difference in sanctification, but not a difference in status.

No more so than there's a difference based on heritage. So many people say, “My family is Lutheran, or my family is Catholic, or my family is Presbyterian,” as if their family church heritage brings them certain perks even if they don't participate themselves, as if the churchiness of their ancestors rubbed off on their own soul a little bit and having church-going in your blood counts for something with God.

Nor is there a difference for those who want to abuse God's blessing of baptism and turn it into a magical, lucky charm. “I was baptized Lutheran, or I was baptized Catholic, or I was baptized Presbyterian.” And while the Catholic church is the only one that officially teaches the false, unbiblical idea that baptism gives a person an “indelible character” that will prevent them from every being able to fall away from faith, it's not only Catholics who believe that false, unbiblical idea. There are Christians who fall for it and treat their baptism as a get-out-of-jail-free card and a license to sin, ignore the Word of God, and do anything they want to, as if getting baptized means you can check off of your bucket list “get saved” and move on to other things.

But the result is the same – for those who try to follow God and for those who don't spend a single second trying to follow God. For those who might rely on their heritage or abuse their baptism. Paul says, “In fact, there is no difference, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” One sin, a thousand sins, a million sins, a billion sins - any scenario falls short. No amount of effort can make up for it, and lack of effort can make up for it. No amount of Christian ancestors can make up for it. Not even your baptism – which by the power of God washes away sins, gives forgiveness, and creates faith – not even your baptism serves as a magical charm that replaces faith.

“There is no difference, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” But, there is also no difference, because all, “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

There is no difference – all are justified. It’s the only solution for sin, the only way a person can get their hands on the righteousness God demands. And it comes freely, by God’s grace. That’s beautifully redundant. Feely means there is no cost, and by grace means it’s a gift. That’s one reason there is no difference – it wasn’t earned, God gave it away.

That’s who he gave it too. Here’s how he did it: redemption. Our congregation in Martin is named after this concept – Our Redeemer’s. Jesus Christ, our redeemer, paid the price and bought us back so that we belong to him. And this was no secret, backroom transaction. God made a public display of it – even pagan Pilate played a role with his little sign, written in three languages for all to see and read, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” That’s who was hanging on the cross, paying the death-price of sin. That’s whose blood was offered as the atonement seat at the foot of God’s throne. That’s whose blood justifies the whole world.

That’s how a person gets a hold of righteousness from God. Not by effort, not by heritage, not by twisting God’s blessing around, and not by some cosmic loophole. God didn’t wink at sin and let it slide, he didn’t give a slap on the wrist and call it even.

God is just. He demands justice. He is perfect and holy. Sin doesn’t slide with God. The price had to be paid. God is gracious, and in his divine restraint, he waited to punish sin, and let it build and build and build up because he had a plan to satisfy both justice and grace. God put the whole alpine-sized pile of sin on his own Son, and crushed his own Son, in the place of us, “so that he would be both just and the one who justifies the person who has faith in Jesus.”

There is no difference. No one produces the righteousness God demands. Everyone gets righteousness from the one and only source – from God himself.

We close with Paul’s good-news summer, verses 21 and 22: “But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known. The Law and the Prophets testify to it. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.” Amen.

Text: *Romans 3:21-26*

Righteousness is given by grace, through faith, to every believer.

But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known. The Law and the Prophets testify to it. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.

In fact, there is no difference, ²³because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God publicly displayed as the atonement seat through faith in his blood. God did this to demonstrate his justice, since, in his divine restraint, he had left the sins that were committed earlier unpunished. ²⁶He did this to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so that he would be both just and the one who justifies the person who has faith in Jesus.