

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, June 12, 2022

“A Right Relationship with God: Am I There Yet?”

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.” Romans 5:1-2

This text reminds me of movie scenes where you need a special security clearance to enter a certain off limits areas. It could be through facial recognition, finger print, or a retina scan. In our Romans Reading, Paul says that we have obtained special access to God's grace through Jesus' work on the cross and his resurrection. Access granted.

As many of you know, I lost my dad on Tuesday after an almost 3 year battle with cancer. I have been grieving for a while now as I wanted more time with my dad. I needed to hear these words from Paul today... especially the first part... about our justification by grace through faith. I am comforted in knowing that my dad's faith in Jesus and his baptism, give us reason for hope, even in death. As good as he was... a talented electrician and musician and good dad... it is only by God's grace that he was saved.

So, what does it mean to be justified by grace through faith? The Greek Word for justified literally means to be put in a right relationship with God. How many of you can confidently say that you are in a right relationship with God? That's a tough question, isn't it? Especially if you don't think you measure up to God's expectations? Which is all of us, right?

Grace is all too often a foreign concept because the world teaches that you have to earn everything by hard work. Well if you are unsure, the good news is that it is God has put us in a right relationship with God through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. On your computer you have left justified, center justified, or right justified. It means how you are aligned. In case of Romans 5, we are aligned with God... put in a right relationship with God... not by our own doing, but by God's action upon the world in Jesus.

So, you **should** have confidence in knowing that it is God who puts us in a right relationship with Godself.

So, if we are justified by our faith... by simply believing in Jesus... we are in a right relationship with God... not by our own works or how good we are. As sinners who mess up every day, this is such good news. As my dad laid in that hospital bed before he took his last breath, there was nothing he could do but to passively receive God's grace and mercy for him as we read scripture and prayed the Lord's Prayer. He worked hard his whole life, but, he, like the rest of us would never be good enough to earn this gift from God.

I play golf in league out at Chaska on Wednesday nights and I played this week. I am not sure you could call what I did golf this week. Regardless, a player on the team we played named Cory is a Christian who teaches drug and alcohol recovery classes at Christ the Rock church. Cory and I talk the faith all the time when we play golf. Cory has a ZZ Top beard and tattoos everywhere. He has a tattoo on one of his calves that says, "forgiven". He is a recovering drug addict who the Lord got a hold of later in life. I said, Cory, I don't have a testimony like yours. I am a cradle Christian, who has always been a part of the church. I don't have a rock bottom story to tell... yet, at least. He told me that he was going to start out his class out this week with a question, "How many of you have victory in your life?" He would let them struggle to answer for a while. How would you answer? How would you describe victory in your life? Would you talk about how many possessions you have, or of your successes. Then he would say, "The only victory you have is that you are here tonight, and the other is that you know Jesus Christ." That's real victory. I told him I liked it. I would come back.

Paul continues... that when you know that you are justified by grace through faith we should have confidence... and when you face suffering in your life, you will have endurance to continue... and when you have endurance... it will build character... and when you have character, it will produce hope... and hope will not disappoint us. The bottom line is that our faith in Jesus leads to hope both now and in the future.

Being a Christian doesn't promise an easy life free from pain. Being a Christian, as we celebrate Holy Trinity Sunday, means that God comes to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God isn't just out there somewhere... distant and aloof. We know God through Jesus and how he loved and treated others. As we face sufferings in our life, knowing that our God is triune means that God journeys with us all the time... not just in the good times. The cross of Jesus tells us that God is especially with us in the low times of our lives... like in the loss of a loved one. Just as Jesus wept at the tomb of his good friend Lazarus, Jesus weeps with us when we experience pain. Jesus is weeping with my family now.

Knowing that God is triune means that God cares about those who are at the end of their rope, or those who mourn, or those who are suffering, or those who are left out. It is because Jesus knew all these things personally.

Just as Paul just described, may you have this peace that surpasses all understanding in your life, and may you know that the grace of God is for you, and may you find hope in the victory of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.