

"RIGHT IN JESUS"
ROMANS 3:19-28
REFORMATION SUNDAY (OBSERVED)
MESSIAH, BOERNE
OCTOBER 29, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

READ TEXT: "FOR THERE IS NO DISTINCTION. FOR ALL HAVE
SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD, AND
ARE JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE AS A GIFT, THROUGH
THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO GOD
PUT FORWARD AS A PROPITIATION BY HIS BLOOD, TO
BE RECEIVED BY FAITH. THIS WAS TO SHOW GOD'S
RIGHTEOUSNESS AT THE PRESENT TIME, SO THAT HE
MIGHT BE JUST AND THE JUSTIFIER OF THE ONE WHO
HAS FAITH IN JESUS." ROMANS 3:22b-26

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGISTS HAVE IDENTIFIED TWO BASIC MOTIVES
THAT HELP TO EXPLAIN HUMAN SOCIAL BEHAVIOR: FIRST, THE NEED
TO PERCEIVE THE WORLD ACCURATELY; AND SECOND, THE NEED TO
BE PERCEIVED POSITIVELY, BOTH IN ONE'S OWN EYES AND IN THE
EYES OF OTHERS. IN OTHER WORDS, PEOPLE BASICALLY WANT TWO
THINGS: TO BE "RIGHT" AND TO BE "GOOD." ALMOST ALL HUMAN
BEHAVIOR IN SOCIETY CAN BE EXPLAINED BY THESE TWO MOTIVES,
INCLUDING YOURS AND MINE. JUST THINK ABOUT IT FOR A
MOMENT: WHY ARE YOU HERE TODAY? LET'S BE HONEST. ISN'T AT
LEAST *PART* OF THE REASON WHY WE'RE HERE TODAY BECAUSE WE
WANT TO BE *RIGHT* AND *GOOD*—NOT ONLY IN OUR OWN EYES AND IN
THE EYES OF OTHERS, BUT ESPECIALLY IN *GOD'S* EYES? OUR TEXT
TODAY ASSURES US THAT WE ARE RIGHT AND GOOD, NOT BECAUSE OF

WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE THINK, OR WHAT WE HAVE DONE, BUT
BECAUSE OF WHO *GOD* IS, WHAT *HE* THINKS ABOUT US, AND WHAT *HE*
HAS DONE FOR US AND *ALL* PEOPLE THROUGH HIS SON, JESUS
CHRIST. AS OUR TEXT SAYS,

FOR THERE IS NO DISTINCTION. FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND
FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD, AND ARE JUSTIFIED,"
THAT IS, DECLARED RIGHTEOUS OR "RIGHT," "BY HIS GRACE
AS A GIFT, THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST
JESUS" (VV 22b-24).

THROUGH MY STUDIES OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AS WELL AS
MY SERVICE IN THE PASTORAL MINISTRY, I HAVE COME TO REALIZE
THAT HUMAN BEINGS ARE MUCH MORE *ALIKE* THAN THEY ARE
DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER. BIOLOGICALLY, WE ARE VERY MUCH
ALIKE, WHICH IS A BLESSING AND MAKES MODERN MEDICAL
MIRACLES SUCH AS ORGAN TRANSPLANTS POSSIBLE. EMOTIONALLY
AND INTELLECTUALLY, WE RESPOND SIMILARLY TO PEOPLE AND
SITUATIONS IN LIFE AND FOLLOW COMMON DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES
SO THAT LEARNING TAKES PLACE IN SIMILAR WAYS AMONG MOST
PEOPLE OF SIMILAR AGES, GENDERS, AND NATIONALITIES. AND
SPIRITUALLY, AS ST. PAUL WRITES, "THERE IS NO DISTINCTION"
(V 22). AS HOLY SCRIPTURE TEACHES, *ALL* PEOPLE ARE
DESCENDED FROM ADAM AND EVE, WHO SINNED AGAINST THE LORD'S
COMMAND AND HAVE PASSED DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION
THE GUILT OF SIN AND THE FALLEN HUMAN NATURE INCLINED
TOWARD EVIL (GEN 3, 4).

THE SINFULNESS OF HUMAN BEINGS IS CLEARLY SEEN IN HUMAN PRIDE. FOR EXAMPLE, WE GENERALLY THINK WE ARE RIGHT IN OUR PERSONAL OPINIONS, PRIVATE PERSPECTIVES, AND IMPERFECT RECOLLECTIONS. PEOPLE CAN BECOME SO CONVINCED THEY ARE RIGHT, IN FACT, THAT THEY WILL LITERALLY SPEND FORTUNES TRYING TO "PROVE" THEIR POSITIONS ARE RIGHT IN COURT. IN THEIR SINFUL PRIDE AND ARROGANCE, HUMAN BEINGS REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THEY MAY BE WRONG OR "GUILTY." FOR EXAMPLE, ONE MUST SEARCH HIGH AND LOW TO FIND AN INMATE WHO ADMITS HIS OR HER GUILT.

DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS, HOWEVER, GOD SAYS THAT WE ARE *WRONG* AND *GUILTY* OF SIN, BOTH THE INHERITED SIN OF ADAM AND EVE AND OUR OWN SINS (PS 51:5; GAL 5:19-21). GOD SAYS, "ALL HAVE SINNED" (V 23), THAT IS, *ALL* HAVE MISSED THE MARK SET FOR US BY GOD IN HIS COMMANDMENTS. AS NONE OF US CAN SHOOT AN ARROW AND PERFECTLY HIT THE BULL'S EYE EVERY TIME, SO *NONE* OF US CAN PERFECTLY KEEP GOD'S COMMANDMENTS. AND, AS JAMES WRITES, ONCE A PERSON BREAKS ONE COMMANDMENT, HE OR SHE IS ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD FOR BREAKING THEM *ALL* (2:10). WE, LIKE THE REST OF HUMANITY, HAVE FALLEN IN ADAM'S SIN AND ARE GUILTY OF SINNING.

THE RESULT OF HAVING FALLEN INTO SIN IS THAT WE *ALL* DESERVE NOTHING BUT GOD'S PUNISHMENT: ETERNAL CONDEMNATION IN HELL. RECENTLY, A BOY FROM WEST LAFAYETTE, INDIANA, WON

THE NATIONAL SPELLING BEE. HE WAS ABLE TO VERBALLY SPELL THE FINAL WORD AFTER HIS OPPONENT MISPELLED HIS WORD. INTERESTINGLY, HOWEVER, HE HAD ACTUALLY MISPELLED THE *FIRST* WORD HE WAS GIVEN TO SPELL VERBALLY, BUT WAS ABLE TO CONTINUE IN THE COMPETITION SINCE HE HAD SCORED SO HIGHLY ON THE WRITTEN TEST. IN OTHER WORDS, HE GOT A SECOND CHANCE. WITH REGARD TO SIN, HOWEVER, WE *DON'T* GET SECOND CHANCES. BECAUSE WE ARE WRONG ON ACCOUNT OF SIN, INSTEAD OF HONOR, WE DESERVE NOTHING BUT *DISHONOR*, AS PAUL WRITES, WE "FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD" (V 23). ACCORDING TO GOD'S LAW, WE ARE *NEVER* RIGHT BUT *ALWAYS* WRONG, *ONLY* GUILTY AND *NEVER*, *NEVER* RIGHTEOUS.

SINCE GETTING THE APPROVAL OF GOD ON THE BASIS OF THE LAW IS HOPELESS, SOME OTHER MEANS MUST BE USED, AND THAT MEANS OR WAY IS HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST (JN 14:6). OUT OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR HIS CREATION, GOD SENT HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, JESUS, INTO THE WORLD (JN 3:16). THE SON OF GOD TOOK ON HUMAN FLESH IN THE PERSON OF JESUS, THE FIRST-BORN SON OF THE VIRGIN MARY, AND HE BECAME OUR REDEEMER. BY MEANS OF HIS PERFECT, SINLESS LIFE, JESUS PAID THE RANSOM PRICE FOR YOUR SINS, FOR MY SINS, AND FOR THE SINS OF *ALL* PEOPLE ON CALVARY'S CROSS—*NO* *EXEPTIONS*. CHRIST JESUS IS *THE MEANS* BY WHICH EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM RECEIVES GOD'S APPROVAL AND IS ACCEPTABLE TO HIM.

PAUL GETS VERY SPECIFIC, VERY GRAPHIC IN OUR TEXT, ABOUT THE WAY IN WHICH WE ARE RANSOMED FROM SIN. THE RANSOMING CONSISTS IN THIS, THAT GOD SET FORTH MESSIAH JESUS TO SERVE LIKE THE COVER OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT, ALSO KNOWN AS THE MERCY SEAT, THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE HIGH PRIEST ENTERED THE HOLY OF HOLIES ONCE A YEAR ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT TO POUR THE BLOOD OF ANIMALS SACRIFICED FOR THE SINS OF ISRAEL ON THE MERCY SEAT. INSIDE THE ARK WERE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE LAW THAT CONDEMNED THE ISRAELITES BECAUSE OF THEIR SINS, BUT THE SACRIFICIAL BLOOD POURED ON THE MERCY SEAT TURNED GOD'S WRATH AWAY FROM THEM. LIKEWISE, JESUS' BLOOD SERVES AS THE PROPITIATION, THE MERCY SEAT, FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD, INCLUDING YOURS AND MINE, TURNING GOD'S WRATH AWAY FROM US.

ALTHOUGH YOU AND I WILL CONTINUE TO SIN DUE TO THE WEAKNESS OF OUR SINFUL NATURE, WHICH IS ALWAYS INCLINED TOWARD EVIL, DOING WHAT IS *WRONG* IN GOD'S EYES, HE DECLARES US "RIGHT," THAT IS, RIGHTEOUS, FOR JESUS' SAKE. THAT'S GOD'S FORENSIC JUSTICE, THE DECLARATION FROM HIS HEAVENLY THRONE THAT HE FINDS US "NOT GUILTY" FOR JESUS' SAKE. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD'S PROMISE OF A DESCENDANT BY WHOM THE WORLD WOULD BE BLESSED, AND GOD "COUNTED IT TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (GEN 15:6). THE SAME

HELD TRUE IN PAUL'S DAY, EVEN AS IT DOES IN OUR OWN. GOD DECLARES *RIGHTEOUS*, OR "*RIGHT*," EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN JESUS AS THEIR GOD AND SAVIOR.

OF COURSE, THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT WE ARE *NEVER* RIGHT. CERTIANLY WE ARE, ESPECIALLY AS CHRISTIANS! WE KNOW THE *TRUTH* (JN 14:6), THE TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE (JN 8:32). WE ALSO GENERALLY LIVE IN OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW OF THE LAND, WHAT LUTHERANS HAVE TRADITIONALLY CALLED *CIVIL RIGHTEOUSNESS*. THIS IS OUR DUTY AS GOD'S CHILDREN AND LAW-ABIDING CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. BUT OUR CIVIL RIGHTEOUSNESS, OUR "GOOD DEEDS," ARE GOD AT WORK IN US "BOTH TO WILL AND TO WORK FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE" (PHIL 2:13). WE DO WHAT IS RIGHT AND GOOD BECAUSE GOD HAS MADE US RIGHT AND GOOD IN JESUS CHRIST, EVEN AS A GOOD TREE MUST BEAR GOOD FRUIT; IT'S OF ITS VERY NATURE (MT 7:17).

SO, WHAT DOES OUR CIVIL RIGHTEOUSNESS ACCOMPLISH—OUR GOOD DEEDS? WHY, THEY *SERVE OUR NEIGHBOR* IN HIS OR HER NEED. GOD USES US IN OUR VOCATIONS AND AVOCATIONS, OUR JOBS AND HOBBIES, TO TAKE CARE OF THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. HE ALSO USES THE BENEFITS WE RECEIVE FROM OUR VOCATIONS TO HELP DECLARE THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS THROUGH OUR OFFERINGS IN SUPPORT OF THE CHURCH. BY OUR GOOD DEEDS, ESPECIALLY BY PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD BY GRACE, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, THROUGH FAITH, GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS SPREAD IN ALL THE WORLD.

DEAR FRIENDS, AS HUMAN BEINGS WE ALWAYS WANT TO BE RIGHT AND CONTINUALLY SEEK TO JUSTIFY OURSELVES AND OUR BEHAVIOR—BOTH GOOD AND BAD. BUT BEFORE GOD, NEITHER OUR NATURE NOR OUR BEHAVIOR MEETS HIS HIGH STANDARDS; WE ALL "FALL SHORT" OF HIS GLORY (V 23). FOR THAT REASON, AND OUT OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR HIS CREATION, HE SENT JESUS INTO THE WORLD TO SUFFER AND DIE ON THE CROSS, TO OFFER HIS LIFE AS THE SIN OFFERING FOR ALL PEOPLE, SO THAT WE MIGHT BE FORGIVEN, THAT IS, DECLARED RIGHTEOUS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST ALONE. SO, WHEN IT COMES TO BEING "RIGHT," STOP TRYING TO JUSTIFY YOURSELF. LET GOD "BE JUST AND THE JUSTIFIER OF THE ONE WHO HAS FAITH IN JESUS" (V 26). BE RIGHT IN JESUS. AMEN.