

Sermon for Reformation Sunday

Date: October 27, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

First Reading: Revelation 14:6-12

Epistle Reading: Romans 3:19-28

Gospel Reading: John 8:31-36

Sermon Text: Romans 3:19-28

Sermon Title: Saved by Grace Alone



Introit: Psalm 34:1-2, 11, 22; Antiphon Psalm 119:46

Hymns:

LSB 644 – The Church's One Foundation

LSB 909 – Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation (Hymn of Praise)

LSB 816 – From All That Dwell Below the Skies (Before Gospel)

P&W #25 – By Grace We Have Been Saved

LSB 761 – Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

LSB 655 – Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

LSB 657 – A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Special



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Text: Romans 3:19-28

We know that whatever the Scriptures say applies to everyone under their influence, and no one can say a thing. The whole world is brought under the judgment of God. Not one person can have God's approval by any effort to follow the laws in the Scriptures. These laws show what sin is.

Now, the way to receive God's approval has been made plain in a way other than the laws in the Scriptures. Moses' Teachings and the Prophets tell us this. Everyone who believes has God's approval through faith in Jesus Christ.

There is no difference between people. Because all people have sinned, they have fallen short of God's glory. They receive God's approval freely by an act of his kindness through the price Christ Jesus paid to set us free from sin. God showed that Christ is the throne of mercy where God's approval is given through faith in Christ's blood. In his patience God waited to deal with sins committed in the past. He waited so that he could display his approval at the present time. This shows that he is a God of justice, a God who approves of people who believe in Jesus.

So, do we have anything to brag about? Bragging has been eliminated. On what basis was it eliminated? On the basis of our own efforts? No, indeed! Rather, it is eliminated on the basis of faith. We conclude that a person has God's approval by faith, not by his own efforts.

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It is by Word alone, Faith alone, and Grace alone that we are saved in Jesus' name. Amen.

Most everyone here probably knows a little something about how a courtroom works. Even if you have never been in one you still have probably at least seen an episode of Judge Judy. (Which should be sufficient intimidation, for most people, to keep you out of a courtroom.) You know that before the judge walks in there is conversation and people milling about a bit, but when the judge walks in everyone stands and is silent, everyone shows respect because the judge has entered the room and he is the one who will hand down the verdict and sentence.

When a person stands before the judge they will often do their best to look their best, or at least better than the other guy. They try to justify their actions, or explain their deeds, to put them in the most positive light. They need to convince the judge that they do not deserve punishment. They are desperate to look innocent, so they can go free.

As the trial comes to an end the time for the judge to speak comes. He looks at the defendant and states with clarity, "guilty" or "innocent" and if guilty what the punishment will be. Once the judge has spoken his words are the verdict, and you can do nothing to change it. Which is why people try so hard to convince the judge of their innocence before the verdict.

Now it's likely that most of you have not stood before a judge in one of our honorable courtrooms for some crime, but you all know you will stand before a judge someday, the Judge. The Author and Perfecter of our faith.¹ We all know that we will have to give an account for our actions, and the many times we have broken the Law of God.

With that future event looming you would think we would want to make every effort to live better lives. You would think we would be making every effort to ensure we keep the Law, to look as innocent as we can, but the truth is we get pretty good at justifying our actions. We perhaps have a little too much practice convincing ourselves that we are far better than we really are.

If some infraction is made public we can justify ourselves by believing that we've done more good than bad, so we're probably okay with God, and everybody else too. If we have to stand before a judge will just tell him we're better than most, so that should be good enough.

In Romans chapter three, Paul shows us the ultimate courtroom, the throne room of Almighty God. There every person will stand on trial, and be tested

1 Hebrews 12:2

according to the perfect Law of God. A Law that demands perfection from us. For all who break the Law the sentence is eternal death, eternal torment, eternal slavery to pain, sorrow, and despair. In this Law there are no loopholes. There are no means by which we can twist the words or their meaning.

The accusations come from God Himself and you cannot claim ignorance of the Law because it has been written on the hearts and minds of every living person from the time of Pentecost.² Believers and unbelievers alike know God's Law. Some may try to deny it, some will try to ignore it, but the Law is the Law and you, like everyone else, know what should and should not be done. When Judgment Day comes there will be no excuse. Everyone will be tested, tried and sentenced.

I wonder if any of you know about the Putnam Competition. It is held on the first Saturday in December each year. Each year best and the brightest students come from all over the United States to try to pass this test. There are only twelve questions on the test and each problem is worth up to ten points. To get a perfect score on the Putnam Competition would be 120 points. The test, for having only 12 questions, takes six hours. The average score on this test each year is usually about one. That is one point out of a possible 120. Some do a little better, but with all the zeros the average comes out to be about one. The test is really hard.

God's test however is much, much harder. On God's test, based on God's Law, you must have a perfect score. Not one comma, not one period can be missed.³ Everything must be done exactly perfect in every way. One slip and you fail – eternally. There are no mulligans, no do-overs, no second chances. You get one shot. The test is as long as your life and the first time you mess up the test is over, and so is any chance you had of entering Heaven.

There is only one loophole in God's Law. There is only one way out. It was promised way back in Genesis 3:15. That is where the loophole was first mentioned and God on purpose, defined, explained, and announced that the loophole was to be proclaimed to all people all over the whole world.⁴ The loophole is this:

God loved the world so much that He gave his only Son
so that everyone who believes in him will not die but will
have eternal life.

2 Jeremiah 31:33

3 Matthew 5:18-20

4 Matthew 28:18-20

God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world.

The loophole in God's Law is this, someone can take the test for you. You can pick anyone you want to take your place. Then their score becomes your score. If they get a perfect score so do you. If they make one mistake however you lose right along with them. It is a heavy and very serious burden we all have to bear. Right?

Wrong! It is wrong because there is One who can take the test for you who will not make a single mistake. He will not get any answers wrong because He wrote the exam. He knows the answers and He grades the test. He is Jesus. Not only did Jesus take the test and pass, but He also stood before the Judge – the Father – and said, for every missed answer by anyone else I will take the punishment. For every error I will pay the price.

On that Cross the Judge unleashed His full fury and rage. His contempt and disdain for sin was taken out on Jesus. On that day, a day we call "Good" Jesus paid the full penalty for all our failures. On Good Friday Jesus said, "It is finished!"⁵ and with those words, proclaimed all people innocent. For everyone who does not refuse the free gift, salvation has already been won; you have already been declared innocent. The test was taken for you, the answers were given for you. It was even handed into the Judge for you.

One of my professors at the Seminary gave us a final exam. This professor is well known for his very difficult tests. They require many hours of preparation and in-depth study. The test seem to go on for hours as each of us frantically writes out each answer. The test is tough. There are many pages. Every time you finish a page it seems that another has been added. You feel like you will never get done in time. With the testing time nearly complete, with your nerves and your mind reeling from the effort, you turn to the last page. On the last page it states:

"All questions on this page have been answered for you.

This page is worth 100 points.

To pass this test you must score 100 points.

All points over 100 are discarded.

This is called Grace."

Everyone leaves the room smiling.

About 500 year ago the Reformation of the Holy Christian Church began. As that effort formed and grew it took on a slogan.

The slogan was:

Grace Alone.

Faith Alone.

Word Alone.

It is grace that has set you free from the Law. It is grace that has given you all the answers to the test. It is grace and grace alone, that gives you access to Heaven and all that waits for us there. We rarely experience that kind of grace. It is so rare that we never expect it. It is always a pleasant and humbling surprise. When you encounter that kind of grace all boasting is put away.⁶ No one can say, “Hey everyone look at me! I passed the test! Look at all the great work I did!” You cannot brag because to do so would make you look like a fool. Everyone knows you were given the answers. Everyone knows that, because they were given the same answers, by the same Teacher. The One who grades the tests.

That was the very foundation of the Reformation that we celebrate today. Corruption, greed, and a lust for power, had brought corruption into the upper echelon of the Church. Those in the highest positions, as well as some who knew they could profit from following them, taught the people they had to earn their own way. They taught it not because Scripture teaches it, but rather because guilt is profitable.

We do not teach such things, but rather we preach Christ crucified!⁷ Salvation is not by works, so that no one can boast.⁸ God alone wrote the Law. God alone took the test. God alone passed the test. God alone grades the test. God did that simply and only because He loves you. God loved us so much He would not, could not, endure being separated from you forever. For that reason, all that you need has already been provided.

That is why we remember the Reformation of the Holy Christian Church. It is an important event to remember, because Martin Luther discovered the beautiful truth, in the Bible, about how God makes sinners right with Himself through faith in Jesus. Faith given and grown in us by the Holy Spirit. This is not a new truth, but one that had been hidden and neglected in too much of the Church for far too long. It is Good News, for the whole world, about a righteousness that we cannot secure on our own. It is God’s gift to us. And because of that gift we, through faith in Jesus, become the children of God. Not just servant of the Most High, but His

6 Ephesians 2:8-9

7 1 Corinthians 1:22:23

8 Ephesians 2:8-9

own children,⁹ set free to live in joyful hope of that day when the verdict will be handed down.

One that day you will have nothing to fear. For those who believe on His name the verdict is already known. It is “Not Guilty!” and the sentence is eternal joy. May God fill you with that joy, and hope, as you place all of your trust in Jesus Christ your Savior.

Amen.

9 1 John 3:1