

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Trinity Sunday
June 16, 2019

Happiness Is Being Justified By Faith Romans 5:1-5

“The count on the batter is 3 and 2.” When a baseball announcer gives you this information, that’s altogether different from what the football commentator has in mind when he says, it’s 3rd and 2. Each sport has its own jargon, and anybody who is interested soon becomes familiar with its lingo. Most fields of human endeavor are like that; they have their own distinct language. For instance, when computer programmers speak of garbage, they don’t mean smelly stuff; they’re referring to intellectual junk, incorrect data, false premises, and consequent wrong conclusions.

The Christian religion, too, has its own vocabulary. Some words take on particular significance in the context of the Holy Scriptures. This does not mean that we should be indifferent about expressing our faith in down to earth language and making it meaningful to others. But it does mean that, despite our efforts and determination to use simple terms in communicating our faith, some words and phrases, otherwise unfamiliar, are so much a part of the Bible that they’re virtually irreplaceable. They are so chock full of meaning that they deserve to be household terms.

This is Trinity Sunday so we should be talking about the doctrine of the Trinity. But since the Trinity is far too complicated to explain we just accept the fact that the Bible speaks about God in three distinct ways as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we will leave it at that today.

But our Second Reading for today talks about “justification by faith.” Many people who know very little about the Lutheran Church know that its cardinal teaching is justification by faith. Surely, then, we who call ourselves Lutherans ought to be acquainted with that term. Right?

In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses some form of ‘justification’ more than 50 times. So, if we expect people to believe us when we profess our high regard for the Bible, we’d better know and understand that word. There are people who won’t take us that seriously if we can’t explain the biblical concept of justification. This term is rooted in the courts of law. When the Bible tells us that we are justified by faith, this terminology pictures God as the judge who pardons you and me, the accused, not because we are innocent (We’re guilty!), but because “the blood of Jesus, God’s Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7) As we face our God at the bar of justice, we have an advocate, an attorney, the Son of the judge who pleads: “Father, remember, I made good for this person’s sin.” So, the Father judge lets us go scot-free.

Little wonder that Paul is joyful in our text about the inner quiet and peace we now have because we are justified by faith. Isn’t it great to know that the plan of our Creator is not to condemn us but to save us! Hamlet was right when he said our conscience makes us cowards. Only he said it more eloquently... “Conscience doth make cowards of us all.” By nature, we’re afraid to meet our Maker; we know what we deserve.

But once we have been to the cross we are no longer cowards, because there, on Calvary, our Triune God, whose marvelous nature we celebrate today, our Maker, Justifier, and Sanctifier, says to us: “fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine.”

Isn't that something! Our holy God still deals with people like you and me! God likes us. God wants us. Instead of abandoning us and letting us stew in our own juices, he went out of his way to help us and fix things up for us, because that's the kind of God we have – God is patient, kind, selfless, loving and forgiving. Forgiveness is there for every one of us. God lays it at our feet whether we want it or not. Right now, the Holy Spirit is nudging us, urging us to believe God and take God at God's word that he forgives us for Christ's sake, pressing us to accept God's free offer of salvation. Every time we say in the Creed, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” we are reaffirming our joy over justification by faith. That's the basis of our peace of mind and peace of soul. God is smiling on us with his forgiving love, and that puts us in good spirits. If anyone has reason to be happy, it is we Christians. Paul is underscoring that matter in our text. That's why I've entitled today's sermon, *Happiness Is Being Justified by faith*.

A true story that came out of the Korean war in the early 1950's provides a twentieth century illustration of this kind of love that God has always had and always will have for us, the love that moved God to come into our world and make arrangements for us to be justified by faith.

Time magazine (April 4, 1954) tells us Ronnie was a little orphan, half Korean and half American, who had been abandoned by his soldier father when he finished his tour of duty in Korea and returned to the States. Forsaken by her husband who returned to his legal wife and family back home, Ronnie's mother had died of malnutrition and tuberculosis when he was a little boy. When some missionaries found him, he was lying in a cold shack on the bare floor, hardly breathing, but they were able to nurse him back to a degree of health, and a kindly Christian Korean nurse, appropriately named Grace, adopted him. She made many sacrifices and denied herself in order to bring Ronnie the food and the vitamins needed by his fragile body. Despite Grace's tender, loving care, when Ronnie dropped a toy, he could not stoop down to pick it up. You see, he had developed tuberculosis of the spine, and, to remedy the weakness in his back, he needed a delicate bone graft. Well, even though she had recently had a severe kidney operation, Grace insisted that bone from her leg be used to fix things up for Ronnie. The doctors were reluctant, but to make a long story short, they finally yielded to her request and took bone from her leg and grafted it into Ronnie's frail frame. For five months she wore a cast, and for a long time thereafter she limped. But Ronnie was okay. Because Grace gave of herself for her adoptive child, he was able to run and play like other children. Do you think Ronnie will ever forget what his adoptive mother did for him? Well, then, can we ever forget what our brother Jesus did for us, when he died for us, "the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."

Does your happiness over your justification show in your face? Well, it should.

Once when Abraham Lincoln was being urged to appoint a certain man to a position in his cabinet, the president said: “No, I won’t do it. I don’t like the man’s face.” “But his friend pleaded, “the poor man is not responsible for his face.” Whereupon Lincoln dismissed the matter with a terse “every man over forty is responsible for his face.”

Paul would agree with President Lincoln. Paul goes so far to say that even when we who are forgiven have troubles and problems, we can keep on smiling because, in God’s loving plan, they are but stepping stones to eternal happiness. Paul wrote, “for this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” (2 Cor. 4:17) Afflictions that God permits to come into our lives mold us into finer and better persons. Our text tells us that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character.

Some 20th century Christians who exemplify what Paul is writing about when he speaks of “character” are the members of the ten Boom family of Holland. Perhaps you’ve read about them in *The Hiding Place*, or maybe you’ve seen the movie bearing the same title. During the 1940’s, the ten Booms dared to give a hiding place in their home to Jews who were fleeing the Nazis. When they were finally caught, the two sisters of the family, Corrie and Betsie, were hauled away to Ravensbruck concentration camp, where 96,000 women lost their lives. Betsie died there, but Corrie survived.

One day while the two girls were in the camp, Betsie said to her sister: “We must tell people what we’ve learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still. They will listen to us Corrie, because we have been there.” Betsie was right. People were still interested in their message; they continued to turn out in large numbers to listen to one “who has been there.” The ten Booms earned the right to speak, didn’t they? That’s why people listened to Corrie when she witnessed to her faith in Christ: “He was beaten, he was mocked, and he died on the cross, and he did it for love, for us.”

Come what may, a Christian can stay cheerful because even death itself is not defeat. Even though Betsie ten Boom died in a concentration camp, she died a victor. She knew that the same Lord, who had brought her through many difficult situations would also lead her safely through the valley of death. That’s the high “hope of sharing the glory of God,” which Paul mentioned in our text – the treasure and privilege of the person who is justified by faith.

You may not have been through all that the ten Booms experienced, but you do have the right to share your joy in Christ with others. One way you can do this is to use an old Hebrew greeting. Shalom is one of those words, like justification, that is hard to replace. Shalom means more than peace, as it is usually translated, so the newer English dictionaries have taken it right into their own language.

Shalom means general well-being and happiness; it denotes a good conscience; it means inner-peace and quiet because of sins forgiven; it means living under the favor and blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There's really no better word than shalom to point up then happiness of being justified by faith. Just as we read the New testament meaning into the Psalms of the Old Testament, we can read New Testament meaning into this ancient word Shalom. Then that old greeting will bubble and bounce and ring and resound like it never did before. Shalom, my friends, Shalom! And may the peace of God rule in your hearts today on this Trinity Sunday because we are justified by faith.