



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for March 19, 2023
“Good News: Made Right”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Romans 5:1-5

The Best Good News of All!

Morehouse College is an historic black college in Atlanta, Georgia. You may have heard of it.

At its 2019 commencement, billionaire investor, Robert Smith was tapped to deliver the commencement address. At the conclusion of his address, he shared with the graduates that he and his family would take their student debt and pay for it.

The crowd was stunned. The students couldn't contain themselves. There were a lot of cheers and, as you might guess, a lot of tears. Smith encouraged the students to pay it forward. I am sure many of them have. Smith took on their debts, saw they were forgiven, and made their accounts right.

Now that's good news.

That is much the same that God does for us when it comes to the debts, we owe him. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, the debt incurred by our sin is once and for all forgiven. That too is good news, the best news of all!

Let's read about that as we turn to Romans 5:1-5 where you will find these words so written.

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Someone Has to Pay

You probably remember the movie from a few years back, *National Treasure*. It starred Nicholas Cage. Cage's character, Ben Gates, who of all things, stole the Declaration of Independence so he could save it. Gates was also interested in the treasure map he was just sure was on the back. That map would lead them to the famed fortune of the Knights Templar.

At the end of the movie, the authorities finally caught up with Ben and his band of accomplices where he was ready to hand over the Declaration and, of all things, plead his case.

At the end the agent tells Ben, *“Someone has to go to jail, Ben.”*

In so many words, “*someone has to pay*” for what’s been done. The agent didn’t really care who. If you remember, Ben was quite content to pass that along to his nemesis, Ian.

“*Someone has to pay.*” That’s the way it is when it comes to the wrong of our lives.

As we have already quoted in this series, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.*” (Romans 3:23-24)

Jesus takes on what is ours and makes it his own. He takes on our sin, pays the ultimate price with his life, and paves the way for our forgiveness.

As we said last week, because of his righteousness God simply doesn’t tolerate sin. His love though paves the way for it to be dealt with. The good news is that we serve a righteous, yet loving God whose every desire is for us to be made right with him.

There is really no “*bargaining chip*” here, save for the full surrender of our lives to him.

Justification

We hear in our passage today another one of those churchy words. It’s justification. Simply put, justification means to “*be made right with.*” Justification is not a matter of what we do but a matter of what God does **for** us at the point of salvation, and all of that is tied to the cross. What Jesus did on the cross is both tough to understand and even tougher to face.

John Wesley used to say that when it came to such things he approached the Lord, “*empty handedly.*” He didn’t want to report that he had done anything to provide for his salvation, save for the humble submission of his life to Christ.

Justification can be viewed three different ways:

- From a legal point of view, justification is the opposite of being condemned. A defendant is pronounced innocent at the behest of the judge. From John 3:17 we read, “*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*” (John 3:17)
- From the point of view of a printer, justification is essentially a matter of removing all the rough edges. One, if not both, edges are lined up. We justify things all the time on our computers.
- From a theological point of view, justification has to do with making one righteous and freeing that person from blame and guilt. Christ’s work on the cross makes that possible in the eyes of our Lord.

A Matter of Grace

There is not one thing that Jesus did on the cross that was deserved.

- The pain and suffering he endured certainly wasn’t deserved.
- The forgiveness we experience because of the cross isn’t deserved either. Yet God in his love offered his only begotten Son to make forgiveness possible.

All of this is a matter of grace, the free gift of God's love.

Sometimes I feel we fail to grasp the seriousness of what Jesus did. We are more apt to turn away than face the cross, much less our sin. When we do face the cross there is sweet release.

By God's grace, things are made right. Our record is wiped clean, we are freed from the past, and propelled to move forward into life God has wanted us to live all along.

You are probably aware that there are all sorts of companies that can take a person's social media history and clean it up, if you will. One such company, among many, is a group called, *Scrubber*. Students applying to college or others pursuing a job will often use their services.

You have heard it said, *"There is nothing quite as serious as pushing send on the computer."* There are indeed consequences to what's posted. There is something freeing about having things cleaned up.

Jesus does that with our lives. The forgiveness he makes possible because of the cross puts the past behind us and causes us to look forward. Again, all of this is a matter of grace.

I read just this week from the daily devotional, *Jesus Calling* a good word about such things. As you may know, *Jesus Calling*, is written in the first person as if Jesus himself is talking.

"Allow the Light of My healing Presence to shine into the deepest recesses of your being—cleansing, healing, refreshing, and renewing you. Trust me enough to accept the full forgiveness that I offer you continually. This great gift, which cost me my life, is for all eternity. Forgiveness is at the very core of my abiding Presence."

I am sure you have noticed the bright red doors that adorn many churches around town. I understand that years ago in Europe a soldier was not allowed to pursue an enemy who had entered through the red doors of a church. Those doors were a symbol of refuge and sanctuary for all who entered them.

Those red doors also signified the blood of Christ that had been shed, so that all who came to him would be saved.

Revelation 3:20 states, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and have fellowship with that person and that person with me."* (Revelation 3:20)

How interesting that when we open the door of our hearts to Christ, we realize full well that the door to God has always been open to us. Such is the good news of God's grace.

Peace and Hope

Paul puts it well when he writes in II Corinthians 5:18-19:

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." (II Corinthians 5:18-19)

Reconciliation brings peace between us and God. It also brings peace between us and other people.

In our passage for today from Romans 5, Paul talks about peace as a by-product of what God offers in Christ. He also talks about hope.

- Peace, in that there is no longer enmity between us and God, but relationship that is strong in every way.
- Hope, in that there is *“strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.”* Great is his faithfulness.

That’s why Paul can turn to the stresses and strains of life and talk about such things as patience, character, and hope, things that provide a way forward for now and forever more.

In Christ, we can make it through any failing that might be ours, any circumstance that might weigh us down, and any degree of doubt that might come our way. This hope will never disappoint us.

At this point, Eugene Peterson writes in his paraphrase of the Bible, *“We simply can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!”* (Eugene Peterson, *The Message*)

Praise be to God.

Pronounced Innocent

I can’t resist telling this story. In a San Diego courtroom two men were on trial for robbery. A witness was being examined by the prosecuting attorney who asked the following, *“Were you at the scene when the robbery took place?”* The man said, *“Yes.”*

“Did you observe the two robbers?” Again, the witness said, *“Yes.”*

The attorney then turned up the volume a bit and boomed out his last question, *“Are these two men present in the courtroom?”*

Before the man could answer both defendants caught up in the moment raised their hands.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We are all guilty.

We are all aware of Presidential pardons. Governors are famous for commuting sentences, sometimes with much controversy.

My good friend, Maxie Dunham tells the story of a young man in his church who was charged with a pretty serious crime. Maxie was asked to come to the court on the day the young man was to appear in case he might be called on to give a character reference.

The strangest things happened. The judge called the boy forward said this, *“I know you are guilty, but I pronounce you innocent.”* And with that he threw down his gavel.

Now that’s justification, and the way it is for those who give their lives to Jesus. Although guilty as sin, those people are pronounced innocent, all on account of what Jesus did on the cross.

Thank God that through Christ he has paved the way for our salvation.