

## Faith Works

Second Sunday of Lent - Year A - 03/08/2020

Psalm Reading: 121

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Gen. 15:1-6, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

We are saved by Grace through Faith in Jesus Christ. This is a fundamental tenet of our Religion. Because we are God's children we believe God loves us and offers to all of us forgiveness and eternal life, forgiveness for our sins and life everlasting with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And it is through our faith in Jesus Christ that we experience this loving grace of God.

It is only God's Grace, God's love that saves us. It is nothing that we do. We need only have faith.

In our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans (4:1-16) the rationale for this understanding is laid out:

*(1) What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter?*

What matter are we talking about? Whether we are saved by grace or by the law.

Paul bases his argument on an incident in the life of Abraham, the patriarchal figure who dominates the book of Genesis and is the father of three of the world's major religions. (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

*(2) If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.*

If Abraham had been justified by his actions, he must have been one heck of a guy.

Always following the rules.

Yes, he would have had something to boast about – in front of his friends, but wouldn't even this boasting be a sin? Yet, even if he could overcome this, Paul points out, he would not have been justified by God for that reason, because righteousness only comes by faith.

*(3) What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

Story of Abraham's vision. (From OT reading: Gen. 15:1-6)

Story about looking at the stars.

I wish I may, I wish I might...

So it is his faith in God that makes him righteous, saves him.

Not about anything he has done.

*(4) Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.(5) However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.*

So when we work, we earn something as our due. But God does not owe us anything. In fact we owe all to God. So it is impossible for us to earn righteousness. But it is by God's love for us that we are offered grace, grace that is freely given whatever we may think we have earned. It is up to us to accept it. To receive the righteousness that God has offered to us.

Still referring to the name of Abraham, Paul in verse 13 nails down this idea that it is not our actions, our work in the world, that makes us righteous:

*(13) It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*

When Paul writes of the Law, he is talking about the Ten Commandments, he is talking about all those little rules laid down in Leviticus and scattered throughout those first five books of the Bible. Some people count 613 laws. It was not following the rules that made Abraham righteous. It was specifically his faith. And all of these rules would be laid down after the time of Abraham, anyway.

*(14) For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless,(15) because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.*

What does it mean when Paul says that the law brings wrath?

We are punished for disobedience.

Civil society's rules.

The vast number.

Ignorance no excuse for disobedience.

If we were to depend on the law for our salvation, the fewer laws the better.

What is the law for<sup>1</sup>?

Guidelines for good human behavior

Reveals our own sinfulness.

For believers, the Law is written on their hearts.

So, the faithful obey the law in gratitude for God's love. The faithful act good because we want to, not because we are compelled. So God's wrath is not our motivator. Our motivator is God's love and the example of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> William Rayment, *Covenant Violations* (Harbor Beach, MI: Self Published, 2017) 112.

And isn't this far better motivation? We do not have a stern and austere God ready to strike us down at any moment with a bolt of lightning, but a God who watches over us bringing us comfort, hope, and love in trying circumstances. This is not a God to be afraid of but a God to hold close, to guide us and walk with us as a friend through difficult times.

Now Paul comes to the conclusion of his argument:  
*(16) Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.*

During this, the second Sunday of Lent, I would be remiss if I did not mention what this Grace that we are saved by is. It is God, sending Jesus into the world, to teach us how to love one another, yes, and to die for our sins. You see, our sins as individuals and as a group are so great that we could never bear the punishment for them. Only Christ is strong enough to bear the burden and so this pure and holy person willingly stands in our stead so we do not undergo the consequences we deserve for our innate selfishness.

Ultimately, this passage from the book of Romans is one that undergirds some of the basic notions of our faith. It tells us that we are saved by Grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. We know this from God's Word to us in the Bible, and for it, we give Glory to God alone.

Praise be to God!

Please pray with me...

God of grace look down upon us, your faithful people. Your love is beyond our capacity for understanding. We only know that it has cost you infinite sacrifice. Lord, inspire within us gratitude, and let this gratitude result in our imitation of your love, that we too may sacrifice, sacrifice for one another, converting our own love into activity in this world, activity that will benefit others physically and bring to all your holy Word.

ἀμήν