

The First Sunday in Lent  
February 26, 2023

““God’s gracious gift of justification to all through Jesus Christ!”

Romans 5:18

By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent is from our Epistle reading Romans 5:18

**“18 Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”**

Here ends our text.

“Potential”. We hear that word used a lot with regard to good things and bad things. There is an athlete at Mississippi State that I just read about that can do something incredible which few others have done. And he is said to have much potential for the major leagues. What is it? Well, some baseball players have the ability to hit the ball either from the left side or the right side. They’re called switch hitters. Ambidextrous. It’s quite an advantage because it’s easier to hit the ball off a pitcher who is throwing opposite of the way you are hitting. Righty against lefty or lefty against righty. You get the idea.

Well, this athlete from Mississippi State has the ability to pitch with either his right or left hand. And do it throwing 90 plus mph pitches. There is a little known rule called the Pat Venditte rule named after a similar athlete in 2015 who could pitch with both hands. Before the batter comes to the plate, the pitcher must declare which hand he’s going to use.

Well, there is a lot of potential for this Mississippi pitcher. We say the same thing about young musicians, actors, artists, or any other profession. A person can have potential to be good at something but then has to work at it to make it happen.

The same can be said negatively about people. If a person is born into a broken family where good values are not taught, but bad examples of living, it is often said that there is a high potential for crime, generation after generation.

Or some might say, that everyone has the potential to get cancer. Well, everyone isn't born with a cancer cells waiting to happen. Our bodies are constantly producing new cells, some of which have the potential to become cancerous. At any given moment, we may be producing cells that have damaged DNA, but that doesn't mean they're destined to become cancer.

Most of the time, cells with damaged DNA either repair themselves or die off .The potential for cancer happens only when neither of those things happen.

But, our text today, there is no talk about potential with regard to good things or bad things – only accomplished facts.

At the moment you were conceived, two things were already accomplished facts. First, you were conceived in sin – the sin you inherited from Adam. And death reigned in you, temporal and eternal.

**“through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,”**

But thanks be to God, there is a second Adam, and He accomplished for you and all people what is the most beautiful and amazing feat known to man.

**“through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”**

By his fall and disobedience Adam lost everlasting life, and caused all men to lose eternal life. But, the active and passive obedience of Christ led to His acquittal which was then accounted to all men as a declaration of forgiveness of sin and the bestowal of eternal life.

There is no potential or misunderstanding with regards to the first Adam or the second Adam, Jesus.

With regards to the first Adam, all men, you and I, are born lost and condemned, not potentially lost. And of course, each of us are very good, or I should say, very bad ambidextrous sinners. We use both hands, both feet, both eyes, all of our being in sinning. For all men are born enslaved to sin. Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even before the law was given. Why? because sin had infected all men.

**“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”**

You know, scientists are still trying to definitively find out where Covid began. They’re trying to trace it back to its origin. But, there is no confusion about where sin began. Adam, the head of all mankind is its origin. And maybe there is someone who has not gotten sick from Covid. So maybe it isn’t a universal sickness, but even now we are praying for members in our congregation who are battling it.

But, sin is universal. And no one has the potential to save oneself. The Israelites were tested for 40 years and failed miserably. Bitten by poisonous snakes, they pleaded to Moses for help for they couldn’t save themselves. And neither can we who have been bitten by the poisonous snake of sin. But God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a cross. And anyone who looks at that snake will be saved.

The bronze snake wasn’t just for some to look at, but for all. And so Jesus speaks of Himself in John 3.

**“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”**

Jesus lived the perfect life of obedience. He was tested in the wilderness for 40 days and did not sin. The devil tempted Him His whole life and Jesus never sinned. So that, when Jesus was lifted up on the cross, He was the perfect sin offering for all people.

**“even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”**

This is not a potential gift. It is an accomplished fact for all people. The free gift of justification of Christ’s righteousness comes to all men – to the whole world. And so it is also a gift for each of us. It is not a potential gift, but an accomplished fact. It is so much greater than what the first Adam gave.

**“For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.”**

And you see here, that the words “all” and “many” are interchangeable. The many, the mass of all people, have a gift that abounds to them. For it is eternal salvation.

Listen again to our text:

**“19 For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”**

The many, the mass of all people will be made righteous. This is the logical future tense. For it did happen by the one Man Jesus on the cross. There was no other way. Jesus, true Man, sinless man became our substitute. And because He is true God, His sacrifice accomplishes righteousness for all people.

It’s done. “It is finished.” Jesus said on the cross. What isn’t finished though is the receiving of this gift. For unless, one receives it, there is no benefit. Romans 10 reminds us that, **“Faith comes from hearing. And hearing by the Word of God”**.

By the power of the Holy Spirit alone, God calls gathers, enlightens and sanctifies His people.

**“17 For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”**

And that’s where we are at this Lenten season – receiving the abundance of His grace through His Word and Sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. That is the life of the church, sharing this Good News to the lost. Because if it is not shared, there is no salvation. Man has no innate potential to be saved. Only by the grace and power of God, does he reverse what first Adam accomplished.

And He has. Ambidextrously. Both hands, both feet nailed to the cross for all sinners. It’s an accomplished fact. It’s your salvation and mine! Your justification and righteousness given to you graciously through the gift of faith. Amen!

**The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**