

1st Sunday in Lent
March 6, 2022
“Real Righteousness!” (Romans 10:10)
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,

Today’s text for this 1st Sunday in Lent is from the Epistle reading for today, Romans 10:10

“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Here ends our text.

I. Fake righteousness is by the law
Matters of the heart. The truth has to be right in one’s heart first in order that what’s confessed with one’s mouth is right also.

Kids catch on to that easily. An old saying that kids say when they want to impress upon another that they are telling the truth is, “Cross my heart and hope to die.”

What does that mean? Well, simply that I’m so convinced that what I’m saying is the truth, that I cross my heart on it and stake my life on it. If I’m lying, I’m lying against the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and He has every right to take my life in this very instant! Did you ever say that as a kid? How about scout’s honor?

Paul begins this chapter 10 of his epistle to the Romans with these words, **“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”**

The fate of the people of Israel really weighs on Paul’s heart. He wants them to be saved, as he does for all people and yet their hearts aren’t right with God.

“Cross my heart and hope to die”, I bear them witness, Paul says, that they have a zeal for God, but are ignorant about what true righteousness is. Their hearts don’t have “real” righteousness. But, they have in fact, a “fake” righteousness. It’s fake news! And that’s a big problem when it comes to matters of the heart. For it determines one’s eternal destiny.

What one believes in one’s heart is then confessed with one’s lips and that either results in one’s eternal salvation in heaven or one’s eternal damnation in hell.

God said in Isaiah 29 about the self-righteous Israelites,

“13 Therefore the Lord said:

“Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths

And honor Me with their lips,

But have removed their hearts far from Me,

And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

14 Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people,

A marvelous work and a wonder;

For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,

And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.”

15 Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the Lord,

And their works are in the dark;

They say, “Who sees us?” and, “Who knows us?”

16 Surely you have things turned around!

Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay;

For shall the thing made say of him who made it,

“He did not make me”?

Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it,

“He has no understanding”?

Their hearts are far removed from God and the honor from their lips is just lip service “cross my heart and hope to die”. Unfortunately, they will perish with the “wisdom of men”, thinking they can hide their thoughts from God.

Fake news! The clay says to the potter, “You did not make me!” “My understanding is right, not yours!”

This is nothing new what Paul is saying. The Israelites have sought to establish their own righteousness before God and submit it as good.

But it's a check that bounces! The righteousness of every man, woman and child including yours and mine is fake righteousness. And only Christ's righteousness puts an end to the law.

Paul continues in the verses right before our text,

“4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. 5 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’ 6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) 7 or, “ ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

You see that there is only one real righteousness in this world – Christ's righteousness. Everything else is fake news. The righteousness which is of the law which Moses writes about is not real. For it's unattainable. Strive as you may, to live by the law perfectly you cannot do it.

Don't fool your heart into thinking it can, Paul says. Don't tell your heart that it can ascend into heaven, reach into heaven by your good works. Yesterday, as another member and I were waiting in line to get a delicious brat, “He turned to me jokingly and said, “I've really earned some extra points with God by letting everyone else get their plate first.” Yes, it is a joke to think that we can open heaven with our good works or raise ourselves up from the abyss of the dead by them! Fake news. Fake righteousness!

How did that conversation with the teacher of the law go in Luke 10?

‘25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”

27 So he answered and said, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

28 And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”

If this is what you're going to cross your heart on and hope to die on, then you are in for a rude awakening. For there is no doing and living, by sinful man, by you and me. It's all fake news, just like all the lies that Satan was spewing at Jesus when He was being tempted the devil's twisting of Scripture that we heard in our

Gospel reading. Pastor Goetz will, I'm sure spend some more time in Bible class unraveling these lies so I won't go into detail here.

But, let's just summarize it as Paul says in Galatians 1.

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”

II. Real righteousness is by faith

“But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way...“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The law says do this and you will live. Impossible. Faith says, it's done, believe it. It's so done that it is in your mouth and in your heart. Christ did it by keeping the law perfectly for you! The word of God, the Gospel of Good News, is in your mouth to believe and be saved.

And you will not be put to shame by trusting in your heart this Gospel truth – this real righteousness which Christ has attained and established and submitted to God for the entire world. This check doesn't bounce. For it's paid for with His blood shed on the cross.

Listen to Paul in our epistle.

““Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Oh, how Paul wants the Jews, his kindred people to also believe. God's righteousness in Christ is real for all people. Anyone who repents with and acknowledges the ashes of his or her sins and calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

That's a matter of the heart that is given through faith. It's a gift and it is confessed with the lips as we just did in the Nicene creed. “Cross my heart and hope to die.” Well, yes we do make the sign of the cross on our hearts that have been saved by Jesus. My heart has received His love and salvation, and when God calls me, I will

not die but rest until He transforms my lowly body into a glorious one! It's nothing that I have done or could ever do.

Christ descended from heaven and humbled Himself for all people. He died and was buried for all the world's sins. And He ascended from the grave on Easter morning and ascended on high to show He has won the victory over the grave!

And He graciously gives us His righteousness with His very body and blood in and under the bread and wine for the remission of your sins. It's given and shed for you, and your faith says it's done. "Yes, this is real righteousness near me and in my mouth and in my heart."

What's left to do? Tell this Good News! How will the world go without a preacher a proclaimer? So, Paul continues in the verses right after our epistle reading.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

**"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!"**

Hearts made beautiful by the righteousness of God become lips that confess this real righteousness to Jews and Greeks alike and take it to them with beautiful feet. Our feet can do a little polka, but more importantly they take the Good News of Christ Crucified, Chi Rho, to the world wherever they go.

**"17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
(Romans 10:17)**

"The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

And we cross our hearts in faith, having received the sign of the cross on our forehead and on our hearts in our baptism that we have been redeemed by Christ Crucified. Christ righteousness for our ashes! All glory to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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