

5th Sunday in Lent
April 3, 2022
“Fake vs. Real righteousness”
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 5th Sunday in Lent is from the Epistle reading for today, Philippians 3:8-9

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;”

Here ends our text.

In our text, Paul has been led by the Holy Spirit to come to two important conclusions about what is fake and what is real in life. He shared them with the Philippians, and they are shared with us this morning also.

First, Paul gives a grand glimpse of His whole previous life, lived as Saul. This life he thought was the absolute best life there was. It was on the road to Damascus that his world was shattered as he was shown by Jesus that it was, in fact, all fake!

Everything that Saul had based his high opinion of himself was, in fact, worthless – a loss – rubbish! In the eyes of his peers, he was admired. It started with his pedigree – his stock. We don’t really talk about people like that anymore. In the horse world, yes, a horse’s stock is very important. Having a sire who has won races makes the offspring very valuable because those genes might have been passed down. And horse owners pay top dollar for the best blood lines.

Paul’s bloodline? Well, he used to take pride in that he was **“of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews”** (v.5). He was the right stuff according to the flesh!

And, of course, as a Hebrew of Hebrews, he took pride in the fact that he was circumcised on the 8th day according to the Old Testament ceremonial laws given to the Israelites. This separated the Israelites from the heathen, the unbelievers. In his life as Saul, he even persecuted those whom he considered heathen, the followers of Jesus.

Not only did he take pride in his zealousness of persecuting the church of Christ, he boasted of his keeping of the law. He was blameless.

“concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” (v.6)

So, Saul, in his own eyes was the real deal. His lineage and his actions matched perfectly. As a Pharisee, he held these things up as a badge of honor for the people to imitate and taught them to follow his fake life!

Do you sometimes have trouble distinguishing between what's fake and what's real? Fake news and real news, for example? Who can you trust to deliver the truth? Why is inflation so high and gas prices so high?

President Biden tweeted this official tweet on April 1st, in all seriousness without any April fool's day disclaimer.

“Putin's invasion of Ukraine has driven up gas prices and food prices all over the world. To help deal with that, yesterday I authorized the release of 1 million barrels per day for the next six months from our Strategic Petroleum Reserve.”

But, weren't gas prices and inflation going up even before the invasion?

Again, immigration reform has not been resolved under many administrations. Under which administration were pictures of immigrant children behind chain linked fencing taken? Was it done for the protection of minors to separate them from predator adults?

Today one can photoshop a picture and place you anywhere in the world as if you're enjoying a vacation in Hawaii. On your phones, kids have fun with a Pokemon app which as they look at the phone to take a picture, the fantastical creatures of the Pokemon world appear as if they are right there wherever you are.

Virtual reality headsets are continually being developed and refined so that you feel like you are in another world. What is fake seems very real. A world which is not completely immersive is also being developed called AR or augmented reality.

The creator, Louis Rosenberg, has this to say, ““In an augmented world, simply walking down the street will become a wild amalgamation of the physical and the virtual, merged so convincingly that the boundaries will disappear in our minds,” he said. “Our surroundings will become filled with persons, places, objects, and activities that don’t actually exist, and yet they will seem deeply authentic to us.”

For Paul, his world, the life of a Pharisee was deeply authentic, but it was in reality - fake. And anyone who tries to live in this world is in danger! Paul tells us in verse 2 of our epistle to be wary of the dogs, the biting kind, not the petting kind. Yes, those who still peddle works righteousness are dogs!

What Paul is making very clear is that there are two kinds of righteousness – fake and real. Playing a game with a virtual reality headset doesn’t have eternal consequences, but not have right righteousness for the soul does!

It’s so important that Paul says he is going to repeat it again. **“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.”**

So too, we have been taught what is real righteousness before, but it never gets old or tedious. It is for the safe keeping of our souls.

What is it? Well, Paul first tells us what it isn’t – **“my own righteousness, which is from the law”**. No one has the pedigree or has a righteousness which is sufficient by the law. For no one can be saved by keeping the law. As James 2:10 reminds us, **“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”**

But Paul goes on to say what is real righteousness. And that can’t be found inside himself or inside any of us. It is only found outside of us in Jesus. And yet, in God’s great love for us, He makes it our righteousness through faith.

Hear our text again,

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and

count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;"

Real righteousness is from God in Christ Jesus! It is excellent for Christ's perfect keeping of the law attained this righteousness. As we heard in last week's epistle from 2 Corinthians 5:21,

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

What was real was that Jesus took on Himself all our sin. And through faith we receive Jesus' righteousness. This is the great exchange. It is a circumcision of the heart. As Paul says in verse 3,

"For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,"

This good news never gets old or tedious. Our baptism is the seal of this great exchange of sin for righteousness. And with this real righteousness comes the power of the resurrection and the complete fellowship with the Lord. Paul continues in verse 10,

"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

The resurrection is real and its worth giving up everything else for. It's worth sharing in the sufferings of Jesus in this life to be conformed more and more to Him in His death. It's worth never giving up running the race until the assured prize is fully given.

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Like Paul, the reality of Christ's righteousness spurs us on to receive the prize. This reality He graciously gives to us through His word and again this morning through His sacrament of the Lord's Supper. There under bread and wine, not visible to our physical eyes, Jesus promises to us that His very body and blood are present. And this real presence gives complete remission of sins to all who trust these words, "given and shed for you".

So, indeed we can do what Paul calls us to do in the first verse of our epistle reading, **"Rejoice in the Lord"**.

And again, this is never tedious to hear once more, Paul closes the chapter with the still not seen physical eyes reality of our true citizenship.

"20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

And this reality of your righteousness through faith in Christ and future glorious transformation is your peace that will guard your heart as Paul says in the very next chapter of Philippians 4:7.

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