

Sermon - October 25, 2015 - Reformation Sunday

The Just and the Justifier

Romans 3:19–28



Dear Friends in Christ

Grace and Peace from our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ!

By God's grace once again we gather in
this House of Prayer where God is our Host and
Minister.

And in thanksgiving we observe once
again that special day, the day on which the
Reformation of the Church began to take place.
The time where the Lord brought the Gospel of
Christ alive again! Although it happened on
October 31st, we observe it today.

Reformation has certainly revolutionized
the world, socially and even economically, but
most importantly spiritually. And for us Christians

to remember and celebrate it is crucially important otherwise we will also forget as the world has done in secularizing all the changes that the Church has caused in the world, taking the credit away from the one who operates those changes in the world, God.

But at the heart of the reformation is the teaching from God's Word, taking us back to the original understating and purpose of God's word. And being people of the Reformation, we ought to keep that original understanding of the Word, especially at the face of an ever changing society, where the temptations to change that word always abound so we the church can keep up with society. God's word never changes, the application yes but not what God intends for each one of according to His Word.

And what God intends is the knowledge and the trust of what Jesus came to do on earth, on the cross of Calvary and from there live according to His will, for a good life here in earth but primarily and ultimately for life eternal in heaven.

We all want a good life on earth, don't wee! However the purpose of the Gospel is not that we live a good life on earth, but that a good life will come because of the Gospel of Christ. It is the Gospel what is at the center of the Reformation, and certainly what Luther brought to light inspired by the Holy Spirit as he read that famous text of Romans 1:17 "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Now, before he came to appreciate this text Luther had some trouble accepting it. He said of the text, it "stood in my way. For I hated that word 'righteousness of God,' which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner" (AE 34:336).

I think that even today, we can relate to Luther, don't we, because well, all the bad people around. Truth be told bad people deserve punishment and God in being Righteous has to punish them, otherwise it will be not fare, just not fare! I mean, we are not bad people by any standards, well sort of we have our week spots, but we have

been good, and good people go to heaven. People who are happy, help others, always smile will go to heaven, but the bad people well God is righteous and will see that they deserve God's wrath.

Yet, today's reading from Romans shows our unrighteousness; it tells us that the Law, God's law exposes our own condition, unrighteous. But thankfully the text also exposes God's attributes of righteousness, that yes God is just and will treat us as such, but not in what we deserve but will declare us righteous because He is the one who will make us just. He, God, is both Just and the Justifier of the unjust, the one who has faith in Jesus. (v. 26)

God is just. That is to say, God is holy and righteous, without sin and hating sin. That's what describes in the first chapters of his letter to the Romans. Much of what he says is based on the fact that God is just. The whole Bible, both testaments, testifies to God's justness and righteousness, and makes it clear that He is a righteous judge.

Earlier in Romans, Paul writes that those with "unrepentant hearts" are "storing up wrath" for themselves "on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (2:5).

That's what the first for today, from Revelation 14:7, assure us: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come."

God being "just" has implications for us, doesn't it! The Creator expected his creatures to be like him. He is just, and he expects us to be just. He is righteous, and he expects us to be righteous. He is holy, and he expects us to be holy. But are we? Are we really just? Even when we consider ourselves good people there is always something that reveals our own condition. For even if we break one commandment we are guilty of the rest, for it is God's commandments, God's law that show us our true nature and condition.

After all God's Law is also just. Paul says God's "justness" is reflected in his Commandments and in our conscience. It should be no surprise that a just God would give just Commandments, and that he would create knowledge within his creatures of what is just. Paul uses this truth in Romans to show that both those who have the written Law, that is the Jews, and those who do not have the written Law, namely, the Gentiles, have the same standard of "justness." For although the Gentiles did not have Moses and the Ten Commandments, they had what we call the moral law, written not on stone, but into the very fiber of their being as God's creatures. In fact, all people of all time have this knowledge. Or in the words of Paul, they "by nature do what the law requires. . . . They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts" (Romans 2:14, 15).

The Law is so "just" that Paul says the "doers of the law who will be justified" (2:13) the problem is that no one can "do" the law, for "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin" (3:9), for "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v 23), Paul says.

It seems silly to have to argue the point that God is just. However, there are times when men doubt that. This, of course, is because sinful mankind is unjust. That is, none of us is perfectly just, righteous, or holy. This lack of justness, righteousness, and holiness we call sin. "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (3:10-12), Paul adds. All, "None," "no one," "not even one," "all," and "together" are unjust. Then he adds: "There is no fear of God before his

eyes.” “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v 23). God is holy, and we are not. God is righteous, and we are not. God is just, and we are not.

That’s a deadly problem! If God and his Law are just and we’re not, if the doers of the Law will be justified, and yet no one does the things of the Law perfectly, how can anyone be justified? How can we go to heaven? And even more troublesome is this idea, how could God be just if he does justify the sinner, the unjust? Let’s think about it, if God is just then He will, he must punish the unjust, but if he doesn’t punish the unjust then He is not just. How can there be justice if sinners get off scot-free?

That is a problem—and not just for us, but for the just God. You see, he can’t be unjust; just is quite simply what he is. But he also wants to be the justifier, to justify us, because he’s also perfectly loving. He can’t not be loving either.

So he devised a way to be both, Just and the justifier. The answer is the faithfulness of Jesus: We “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (vv 24–26,).

Propitiation is the fact that he took upon himself the due punishment that our injustice deserves, offering his life for us, dying on the cross of Calvary for us, in our place.

Although God “passed over” the former sins in his divine forbearance, Christ’s sacrifice paid the price for all those sins, indeed for past, present, and even future sins. God did not let them go unjustly unpunished. God demonstrates, or shows, his own just nature by demanding payment, by punishing sin with the eternal pains and suffering of hell that sin deserves. But he fulfilled his longing to be the justifier by himself becoming the payment. The payment was Jesus. God is shown just in his Just One. God provides a substitute for us. Jesus the Just One faithfully lived under the Law, fulfilling it perfectly, and then offered his perfect life on the cross as a payment for our sins. There the penalty for our being unjust, those very sufferings of hell, fell upon him. On the cross, he became everything that is “unjust.” He “became sin” on the cross. There sin is justly punished. Then in what Luther calls the “happy exchange,” Jesus’ faithfulness is applied to us. The Just One makes us just in God’s eyes.

Christ’s work allows God both to justly punish sin and graciously forgive sinners. And this work is received by faith, for it is a gift. Gifts are not earned; they are received. And this faith is specifically in Jesus, the gift is for the “one who has faith in Jesus” (v 26). God justifies the unjust through faith in the Just One.

Now this, dear friends, is a doctrine, a teaching central to the Reformation of the Church, and is sound Theology. But, so what, what does this have to do with us, what does that mean to each one of us in our daily life? Well, all! It has to do all, it is who we are, and our lives are to be based on the Just God and his declaring us just.

This is the joyous Gospel that changed the world for Luther—and in a very real sense changed the world, period. Luther had always been taught to think of God’s righteousness, his justice, as that just standard by which God punished unrighteousness. But when he came to realize that God gave Christ’s righteousness to us by faith, it was, he said, as if he “was altogether born again and had entered

paradise itself through open gates” (AE 34:337). And that Gospel that Luther and the Reformation rediscovered has been going out to the world ever since. And it is the Gospel that gives us life, that brings us to be born again! It is your life in Christ and who you are!

Yes, God’s righteousness is seen in the fact that God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. And for that we can all be thankful, that’s how He Hosts you today and that’s how He ministers to you, and more!

Amen.