

ROMANS 5:18–19

Confirmation Sunday, May 7, 2023

Smith

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

When I begin our private Confirmation examinations, I usually ask the student to tell his parents why he or she is saved. The answer was no different in any of our interviews: Because Jesus died for my sins. We spent two years together studying this question and many others. The payment for our sins did two things. First, it supplied what we lost, and second, it removed what we could not scrape off.

What was lost was the image of God, the righteousness condition in which God originally made mankind. When the Son of God came down to take up our human flesh, he lived completely under the requirements of God in every way, keeping the Ten Commandments so perfectly that the Holy Spirit himself said that “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”¹ And since he came here for our sakes, that holy perfect life he led is set on us like, well, like a white confirmation gown; the prophet says, “He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.”² His righteousness is our because we have faith in him. His “righteous act,” Paul says, “resulted in justification and life for all people.”

And then there’s the problem of our sin, that guilt we could not scrape off. That’s what the cross was all about. He obeyed the Father’s original sentence, the threat given to Adam and Eve: “You shall surely die.” So Paul reviews the facts: “By the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners.”

But on account of Jesus’ death on the cross, the true penalty for our sins is all over, finished, and paid for by Jesus. We still experience death, but death only as a sleep we will wake up from, and on Judgment we will be taken home by God to heaven forever.

There are people, brilliant men and women, who know all these things. But just knowing about Jesus is not faith. Faith is the trust we have-- and it doesn’t need to be an emotion, necessarily, but an acknowledgement-- that what Jesus did: living in my place, dying in my

¹ Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22

² Isaiah 61:10

place, and rising from the dead to show God's acceptance of all these things, was for my sake. That my sins are covered.

When it comes to sin, then, yes, we should feel an emotion. We should feel afraid of what the punishment for sin is. This is the work of the Law of God, all of the passages of the Old and New Testament that expose our sins as sins and rebellion against God. The work of the law is to expose the faults of people who are rigid in their sins, to give them examples of God's wrath like the fire of Elijah, the waters of the flood, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the heartbreaking prophecy of Jesus that he will say to some who use his name, "I don't know you."

But for those who are sorry about their sins, heartbroken and trembling over their guilt, the gospel is there to console and bind up their wounds; to give them comfort directly from the cross of Christ. Paul again says that this is "life for people" and "through the obedience of the one man, many will be made righteous."

So, how does this work in your life? What I've been describing up to now is the path and message of how God saves us: Justification. But we have a way of responding, which is our life of sanctification. If you want, you can just think of this as your life of thanks.

Our life of thanks is a life that keeps learning about Jesus.

In our confirmation examinations I asked our young people if there is anything they would like to learn more about, that we didn't cover in our classes together? Those who had a response all said the same thing, that they wanted to learn more about Bible stories like the Creation, the Flood, David and Goliath, crossing the Red Sea, and so on. And all of those are things we cover in worship in our sermons and also in our teen and adult Bible studies. And this is for everyone here: we have many things to offer, from in-person classes to podcasts and you-tube recording of past and present Bible studies. It's all there waiting patiently for you.

Our life of thanks is also a life that keeps struggling against sins.

The reason we spend time on the Ten Commandments is to learn just what God's will is for our lives, so that we're not stunned when we find out that yes, it's sinful for a man and woman to live together without getting married first, not only because they're breaking the Sixth Commandment, but also because they're throwing themselves and this person that they love into the arena of the impossible battle between the body's desire and the will of God, and also because we would be setting an ungodly example for the other people in our lives, who

would wonder, if my big sister or my best friend's brother can do this, why can't I? So the more we study the Commandments and their meanings, which Luther took from clear passages in the Epistles and the Psalms, and hold my life up to the mirror of the Law, and admit: This is how far I have fallen. This is how much I need my Savior. And then be assured: I have a Savior, and I pray that he will help me turn away from my sin.

Our life of thanks is also a life that strives to serve.

Christianity is not a spectator sport. We participate. Even as we sit in the pews and benches, we can be thinking: some younger person is looking up to me. What kind of an example do I set? Or we become aware that there are things we do in church that I could do. And it's really up to each one of us to say, "How can I help? How can I serve?"

Our life of thanks is also a life that struggles as we bear crosses.

During Covid, a new Tom Hanks movie came out (for you younger people, he played Woody in Toy Story). It's called *Greyhound*, a World War II film about ships in the Atlantic during a submarine attack that goes on for days. And some of the first and last things we hear in the film are this captain saying Luther's Morning Prayer and Luther's Evening Prayer, straight out of your Catechism. Just like Hamlet he is portrayed as being Lutheran, and he sets a fine example of how a Christian does whatever his duty may be out of faith, as we struggle to bear the crosses of life: danger, sickness, trouble, prejudice, and even death. "Turn to me," God says. He wants us to rely on him, to trust in him.

Our life of thanks is also a life that remains faithful to the end.

These pieces of the Catechism that we teach our young people are not meant to be just be a lesson we teach through twice and then set down. Read through the basic parts of the catechism at least once a year if not more often. I teach year after year, I read it on the edge of my bed, I share it with my sons, we talk about it when we travel, and I try to include its language when I speak.

These simple truths remind us of the answers to the two questions that divide all religion and even all Christian denominations. How we answer these two questions is a testimony to condition of our souls: Who is Jesus Christ? And how am I saved? Trusting in him and in him alone drives us to a life of thanks that is also a life that knows peace.

Amen.