

## 29/10/2023 Romans 3:19-28 Reformation

Two images of the courtroom

- One with us in the dock, and God as judge.
- But also, and perhaps surprisingly
- One with God in the dock
- And creation in the judge's seat.
- The Good News:
- In Christ Jesus God declares us innocent
- So that we can come near to God,
- Learn who he is, and love as members of his household.
- More than this:
- In Christ God also reveals that he is not cruel or distant
- Or unconcerned by the suffering of this world
- But that he shows that he himself is just
- And wins our trust.

Let's get into the text: **Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For 'no human being will be justified in his sight' by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.**

- The background: that the Gospel is the power of God
- And that as we trust, we receive the gift of salvation.

St Paul has been unfolding the problem:

- Human sin: among the Gentiles who do not know God's law
- But also among the Jews, who have the law
- But do not keep it: A pious Jew might think
- They have their innocence in keeping the law:
- So think of Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector –

- The Pharisee boasts before God of his law keeping (Luke 18:9-14).
- But as Jesus reveals in the Sermon on the Mount
- The law goes down to the heart where there is no escape.
- The law: shuts up human boasting
- And reveals that we are accountable to God.
- It brings with it the knowledge of sin.

An analogy: an x-ray machine:

- It reveals what is broken, but does not heal.

An aside: three uses of the law in the Lutheran tradition:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> or civil use: the law of the land
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> or theological use: what we have today
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> use: showing us the shape of Christian life.

The law can't heal us, can't bring us a verdict of innocent

- But St Paul says that there is gospel, there is good news: **But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.**
- God gives his declaration of righteousness
- Literally: **through the faith of Jesus**
- The trust that we have, that he bears our sins;
- Also: Jesus' own faithfulness to the Father.

This righteousness, this justice, this innocence

- Is for all people; for Jew and Gentile:
- We have a common humanity
- In our common need for the mercy of God

- This is what St Paul says: **For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.**
- There is imagery from the temple here
- From the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)
- We can pause and tap in to something
- That goes deep into our humanity:
- Our need for a sacrifice: for something or someone
- To take on the burden of our sin, or shame, our exclusion.
- St Paul is saying that Christ's blood cleanses us from our sin
- And gives us access to the Father.

Listen to how St Paul goes on: **[God] did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.**

- The last bit, that God justifies the one who has faith in Christ
- We are used to this
- It's not that our faith is a good work that we do for God:
- The example of someone trapped underwater:
- Breathing in oxygen from a tank:
- There is trust, but it is in the one showing the help.
- But the other bit is less expected: **it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous**
- That God is just
- We need to hear this: especially when we are tempted to think
- That God is cruel, or remote, or uncaring
- He gives his own Son to show his love, to win our trust.

This is how St Paul sums up what he has been talking about: **Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.**

- Think of the Pharisee in the parable: he boasts before God
- But the law as it is revealed in Christ stops our mouths:
- We together, in our common humanity,
- Have nothing to boast about before God.
- But we do not need to despair:
- God shares with us his declaration of innocence.
- In Christ we have the favour of God, the approval of God,
- So that we may not be ashamed,
- So that we may not flee from God,
- But so that we may share in the love
- Which he has first shown us.