

The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity  
10 September, Anno Domini 2023  
St. Luke 17:11-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Redeemed of the Lord,

Central to the Christian faith, central to the true Christian religion being a source of comfort for sinners, is the doctrine of justification. That we have been declared by God to be forgiven and righteous in His sight solely because of Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf is absolutely necessary. But we can't really say that with certainty unless we can just as unequivocally say that the sins of every sinner of all time were and still are forgiven.

Once you begin to try to carve out groups of people for whom the Son of God died and those for whom He did not, pretty soon you will find yourself with those who aren't. Why? Because nowhere in Scripture will you find a word that makes such a distinction. Instead, Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus died for ALL. St. Paul writes "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered *once for all* into the holy places." (Heb. 9:11-12). Jesus Himself is just as clear when He says "For God so loved *the world* that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17) And St. Paul writes, as we just committed to our hearts a few weeks ago "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." (1 Tim. 1:15)

But if our certainty is not completely in the Blood of Jesus, then we are forced to develop the boundaries and make the decision as to who is in and who is out. And inevitably that line is drawn between those who supposedly deserve it and those who don't based on their merits. Are your merits good enough to stand up to the test? Maybe right now, but what about tomorrow when you yell at your child or when you disobey your parents or when you lust after that actor or actress in the commercial or when you ignore your Christian family who are hurting and missing? Will you be so sure that you're worthy of salvation then?

The full payment of every sin of every sinner must be 100% certain or nothing is certain. This doctrine is known as objective justification. Our salvation is a completely accomplished fact. Two millennia ago, God's only-begotten Son took on human flesh, lived and walked on this earth, was crucified under Pontius Pilate. His death was the death of all sinners. He bore every sin of every man, woman, and child of every generation of every ethnicity of every time - from Adam and Eve to those who will be alive when Jesus returns in glory. Jesus' resurrection from the dead establishes that fact. There is simply no more sin to be paid for, no more sin to make atonement for. You can walk up to any person on the planet and say with absolute certainty "Jesus died for you and has forgiven you all your sins." It is as objective a reality as you sitting here in church today.

What could be more comforting? If Jesus died for ALL sins that means He most certainly died for yours. He didn't just die for believers. He didn't just die for good people (which wouldn't really make a whole lot of sense anyway). Jesus died for absolutely everyone. That is objective justification - it is an accomplished fact.

Consider the ten lepers. We don't really know what they were expecting from Jesus. I think we assume healing but it could have just been some money or food. We don't know their faith. We don't know who they believed Jesus to be. All we know is their prayer "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." But this story isn't about the ten lepers. The point isn't to dive into the condition or the prayer of the lepers. This story is about what Jesus does. Jesus gives all of them everything. "Were not all ten cleansed?" All ten are healed. All ten are forgiven their sins. That's what Jesus does. It doesn't matter whether or not they believe it. It doesn't matter if they will come back and thank Him. He simply does it, completely heals them inside and out. And He doesn't take back the healing because they don't return. He is merciful and takes pleasure in giving people His gifts. They are healed. All of them. That is objective justification. Jesus died and has taken away the sin of the whole world.

But only one leper returned. Only one recognized and believed that the true priest, temple, and sacrifice was the man who had just told them to go. He wasn't special. He wasn't smarter or more deserving. He had the same need - he needed his sins forgiven. He needed the sin that condemned him and lay at the root of his leprosy to be mercifully taken away by God. And God did - not in the temple, not by the sacrifices of bulls or goats. By Jesus. Those other things were obsolete because the promised Messiah to which they pointed had come. This Samaritan was blessed by God to see in Jesus not just a Savior or even the Savior, but his Savior.

And not just his Savior from leprosy and expulsion from the community but from everlasting condemnation. He believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the promises God had made. More than that, he believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of all God's promises for him, that now, in the person of Jesus, God had come to show mercy to him, a Samaritan, a sinner.

That is subjective justification - the belief, the trust that what God objectively did in Christ for everyone, He did for you too. Objective justification is belief in fact and events. Subjective justification is the trust of heart that knows no other consolation, no other hope, no other source of joy than the good news that God's only Son laid down His sinless life in full payment for yours without any merit or worthiness in you. Subjective justification brings the objective truth and blessing of the cross to the individual sinner and brings peace to his terrified conscience. What good is a Savior if you can't be sure he came to save you? Subjective justification sets the sinner free from his own guilt and shame. Subjective justification is faith that Jesus is for you.

Jesus died. That's true. But Jesus died for you, for your sins, all of them. He died for your anger, for your idolatry, for your lovelessness, for your thanklessness, for your anxiety and worry. He died for all your failings and all your weaknesses. He destroyed your death and opened the gates of heaven to you. Your forgiveness of your sins, not just forgiveness generally speaking, is as absolutely sure as your Baptism, as close to you as the bread and wine of Holy Communion. In those bearers of His promises, God has graciously made sure that you can say with all confidence that "All that Jesus is and did and won is for me, as covered in sin from to head to foot as I am."

Jesus died. That's true. But unless your heart knows that Jesus hung on the cross specifically for you, He could have died a thousand deaths and it would be utterly useless for you. Objective justification is of no help to you unless you believe that it is objectively accomplished for you in its entirety for the simple reason that God, in Christ, is merciful to all sinners, to all who confess that they are hopelessly covered in the leprosy of unbelief and who believe that Mary's son is the Lamb of God who has come to take away for their sin. This is why God so graciously causes the work of Christ to be proclaimed in your hearing - because He wants you to know, to believe, that He sent Jesus for you.

Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins. That's true. Jesus died for the forgiveness of your sins. That is just as true. Go. Your faith in Jesus has saved you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.