

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, June 11, 2023**

**Rev. Gerald Luck**

**Text:** Romans 4:13, 20b-25

**Theme:** Faith Based Healing

**Précis:** Our merciful Saviour calls us to salvation and newness of life not by means of the law but by the knowledge of God's grace.

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*Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Heavenly Father through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.* (1 Timothy 1:2)

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Romans 4:13, 20b-25

The promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ...he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

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*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.* (Psalm 19:14)

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My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus our Lord - Friends: God is honing our understanding of discipline and repentance, daily. And in doing so, God is

also blessing us to help our friends through their misunderstandings of God's holy word and His gift of faith.

Misconceptions, like how the law can save someone or make or make someone to live eternally. That's a very common thought, by the way - so common, in fact, that it's a centre point of every single world religion outside of Christendom.

Everyone teaches that to reach heaven, or some sort of eternal reward, you have to prove yourself acceptable according to some sort of established rules. It might be tithing, it might be serving, it might be worshipping in a certain way or behaving in a certain way. On the other side of that equation, it might be not behaving in a certain way - like not harming your neighbour by stealing, killing and so on. Keep all the rules, and you'll live forever, so to speak. Trouble is, each and every one of us sink right back into the dust from which we came.

If you look at all the headstones, there's no mistaking it. Every one of them, by virtue of them being "grave markers" will tell you the exact same thing. They'll all say, "I failed to keep the law."

But there's the other side of that certainty, too. There's the Gospel. Listen to what the apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome. There, in the opening sentences of chapter 8, he says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:1-4) Walking in the spirit? That's a completely new discipline.

Walking in the Spirit? That's a completely new discipline. Putting our trust in

someone to keep God's laws perfectly, in our place, is a new teaching. It's something that is completely foreign to our sin sick, trembling hearts and something that we, of our own accord can't even bring ourselves to understand, let alone trust.

We're like Abraham, in that regard. God told him exactly what He intended to do, and God then carried out His promise for the sake of all humanity. That's a bit of a head scratcher, if you think about it.

Abraham had faith. That's what scripture tells us. His faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But in that faith walk, Abraham was still just as shaky and frail and human in trusting God's promises as the rest of us.

A famine came over the land, and Abram and Sarai (as they was called in those early years) had to pass through Egypt. But even after hearing God's promise, Abram feared that the reigning pharaoh would kill him and take Sarai for himself and prevent the promise's fulfillment. So he led pharaoh to believe that Sarai was his sister.

But God, in response to Abram's fears, intervened. He afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues - to the point where pharaoh exclaimed, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go."

And then, there was that other faux pas: Right from the start God said that Abram would be the father of a great nation, and that he would be a blessing. Right from the start God told him that he would be Abram's shield and that his reward would be very great and that he would have his very own son. God even passed through that bull that Abram cut in two to seal his covenant with

assuring Abram that God would do this great work, and yet Abram looked to his own means to fulfill what only God could promise. In his weakness, Abram followed Sarai's instruction to have a child through Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant.

Even so, God kept His promise, God was faithful to them. He even gave them new names to help them better understand His trustworthiness. Abram, the "great father" became Abraham "[I give you as] a father of a multitude of nations." And Sarai, the "(princess or woman) of great strength" became Sarah, "whose strength didn't belong exclusively to her immediate family, but to the future of the nation of Israel and even the world at large." (Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenber and Rev. )

So you see, Abraham's upbuilding was by the grace of God. It was the active work of the Gospel (something done by God) and not the law (something that was supposed to be done by man).

Fast forward to the days just after that first Pentecost right after our Lord ascended into heaven.

Peter delivers this great sermon to the people of Israel who are still under the law and he tells them what they did - they crucified God's Christ. Cut to the heart, the people gathered there that day cried out with one loud voice, "What shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:38-39)

The promise is for you.

Repentance is a turning from the old ways to trust in something completely new. Its a turning from the law which says that we're dead in our transgressions to the Gospel which says we've been made alive in Christ. It's the new epitaph on our headstones that tells the world we aren't at all dead, but are, instead, in Christ.

The discipline that we have is Abraham's discipline, King David's discipline, and the discipline of all the prophets. It's Simon Peter's discipline, and that of the other apostles. It's Paul's discipline and the discipline of all the faithful people named in the Bible and all those whose names are recorded in the Lamb's book of life. It's your discipline and my discipline. It's a discipline that confesses our imperfection under the law but our perfection granted to us by the grace of God. It's the discipline of that simple child like faith that trusts in God's covenant to save.

When you're struggling or when you see someone struggling under the burden of the law don't be afraid. God is honing our understanding of discipline and repentance, daily, and in doing so, He's blessing us to remember His faithfulness.

In close, I'd like to just quote you the last verse of the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel, something that, I can say, is very much applicable to all of scripture and to your lives here on this side of eternity and beyond. John writes, "These [words] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

Believe, my dear friends. Believe. Allow yourselves to be built up in faith according to the promises of God and you will never fail. Make that your new discipline. Don't live under the law but live upheld by God's grace. He will keep

His promises to life eternal

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

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*May the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen (Philippians 4:7)*