

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Quinquagesima, February 26, 2017**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 321,253:8-9,317,373:1-5, 377:9-10.

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13-53:12, 2 Corinthians 5:15-21, Matt. 18:21-35.

Sermon Text: Acts 13:37-39

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the Third Article of the Creed we confess that we believe in the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins has been called the most important gift of the Holy Ghost. The forgiveness of sins is not something we can earn. It is not conditional. You do not have to do something to deserve forgiveness from God or to prove yourself worthy or deserving of forgiveness.

The forgiveness of sins is not something we can see. But it is something that totally changes the life of the Christian. The assurance that our sins are forgiven leads to fruits of faith, as we pray “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”, that is, we forgive others because God forgives our sins.

What do we have without the forgiveness of sins? Nothing. No hope of eternal life. So today let’s review

**THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS**

- 1. What is the Forgiveness of Sins?**
- 2. How is it given to men?**

We confess in the Third Article “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” What this means is that the Bible assures me that God daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. This is clear from Scripture which assures us that the Lord is the one “*who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases,*” Psalm 103:2-3 (KJV) “*who forgives all your sins.*” (NIV) The psalmist also asks – and answers the question: “*If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared.*” Psalm 130:3-4.

Because every sin is really committed against God, he alone can forgive it. The confession of the Christian is: “*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*” Psalm 51:4-5 (NIV) Of course this must be and should be the confession of every human. But the law of God must be taught and proclaimed so that every person recognizes this.

The Bible asks: “*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” Mark 2:7 (NIV) And in the Bible God assures me that he does forgive sins. From no other book can we learn this blessed fact. And because God himself speaks to me in the Bible, I know that its assurance and promise of forgiveness “*is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*” 1 Timothy 1:15 (NIV) And the one who receives the forgiveness of sins prays and practices forgiving others, as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer.

So how is it that God forgives sins? How did and does God do this? God forgives your sins by declaring you righteous, that is, by declaring you “not guilty”. This is called justification. That means that God no longer charges, or imputes, your sins to you. A multitude of Bible passages makes this fact clear: “*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.*” 2 Corinthians 5:19 (KJV) And a few verses later: “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) We read in Romans: “*To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*” Romans 4:5 (NIV) And again in

Romans: ***“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”*** Romans 8:33-34 (NIV)

Because we were the ones who had actually committed these sins, they should, by rights, be charged against us. But God laid all our sins on Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God. Therefore he does not impute them, does not charge them or hold them against us, but rather he justifies the ungodly, that is, us, who were by nature and by our own deeds wicked, sinful, and ungodly. All the ungodly, that is, all men, he declares just and righteous.

“The righteousness of God” is not a righteousness which God demands of us, and which we must achieve by our own works, but it is the righteousness which Christ earned for us, which God recognizes as complete, comprehensive, and fully satisfactory. It totally satisfies God’s demand ***“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”*** Leviticus 19:2 (NIV) This is the righteousness or perfection which he imputes or credits to us without our works or good deeds. We repeat: this act of God whereby he does not impute sins to men on earth, but imputes to them righteousness is called justification. It does not consist in this that we must first become just or good in our lives, but in this that God, while we were yet sinners, declared us just and righteous. We read in Romans: ***“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”*** Romans 5:8-9 (NIV)

So why would God forgive your sins? Why should he? What induces or leads or causes God to forgive your sins? God forgives my sins, not because of any merit or worthiness in me, but because of his grace, his love, for Christ's sake. Listen to the two parts of this passage, a passage which teaches both Law and Gospel: ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”*** Romans 3:23-24 (NIV) Scripture repeats that fact: ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”*** Eph. 1:7 (NIV)

Remember the tax collector in the Temple? He confessed his sins before God and Jesus says: ***“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*** Luke 18:14 (NIV)

How can God declare a guilty person just? Not because of our own merit or worthiness, for we all have sinned and deserved nothing but punishment. God does not forgive our evil works because of some good works we think we have done. A thousand good works cannot undo and blot out even one transgression, one sin. We cannot make up for any of our shortcomings and so induce God to forgive them.

We are ***“justified freely by His grace”*** Romans 3:24 (KJV); we have ***“redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”*** Ephesians 1:7 (KJV)

The grace of God excludes all merit on the part of man. This unmerited love of God for man moved him to forgive us our sins.

“For Christ's sake”. The grace of God includes the merits of Christ. We are justified ***“through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”*** Romans 3:24 (KJV) God did not forgive sins without full atonement having been made. Yet instead of demanding full payment from us, he sent his Son to be our Substitute, who in our place fulfilled the Law and paid the penalty of our guilt. Thus God forgives sins only for Christ's sake, and no man can find grace and forgiveness with God if he rejects the Redeemer. We must emphasize again: Forgiveness of sins has been obtained for all, because Christ has fully atoned for the sins of all mankind. ***“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*** 1 John 2:2 (NIV) And again: ***“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NIV)

Christ lived and died for all men, and so he is the propitiation, that is, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. His resurrection proves that God accepted the sacrifice of his Son for the reconciliation of the world, and therefore he no longer imputes unto men their trespasses. This means that the sins of all men are not only atoned for, but they are also forgiven by God. This has been called universal or objective justification.

So where and how does God offer you the forgiveness of sins? God offers the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel. ***“Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [Jesus’] name to all nations.”*** Luke 24:47 (NIV) We who believe have the calling to preach that true, pure Gospel. ***“He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NIV)

The fact that God forgave sins to men and willed to them the righteousness of Christ is not known to man by nature. So God revealed it to us in the Gospel. It tells us that God did reconcile the world unto himself. This Gospel speaks not of a possible forgiveness, or a future forgiveness, but it proclaims forgiveness as an accomplished fact. Because this Gospel is preached in the Christian church, we confess, “In this Christian Church He daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers”. “Daily” means that this offer of forgiveness is open for us at all times, every hour of the day. And because we daily sin much, we should daily reassure ourselves of this forgiveness from the promises of the Gospel. “Fully” means that this treasure of forgiveness cannot be exhausted; that God does not forgive only in part, half-ways, but completely, fully, not only some sins, but all sins. The Gospel, therefore, is the basket into which God has placed for all men forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal salvation.

How does this forgiveness of sins become yours? It becomes yours by believing the Gospel. Paul is especially clear in Romans: ***“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”*** Romans 3:28 (NIV) ***“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”*** Romans 4:5 (NIV)

We could talk for a long time about this but let’s use this example: Food may be ready for you on the table, but if you refuse to eat it, it will not benefit you. So the forgiveness of your sins is ready for you in the Gospel, but if you refuse to accept it, it will not help you. Now forgiveness of sins is not a material thing we can hold and take in our hand, but a spiritual blessing, which can be taken only by faith. In the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, that is, the offer of this righteousness is intended to work faith in the heart of man, by which faith he, in turn, appropriates to himself this righteousness. Where there is no faith, the Gospel does not profit (Heb. 4:2). The Gospel is the hand by which God offers forgiveness to all men; faith is the hand by which the individual takes what God offers. Thus by faith we enter into personal possession of the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness of Christ, which is there for all and is by God imputed personally to the believer. Our sins are not forgiven first when we believe, for they were forgiven when God accepted the sacrifice of his Son for our sins, but forgiveness is bestowed and imparted to us the very moment that we come to faith. That is what it means that we are justified by faith and that faith is counted for righteousness. This is called personal or subjective justification. Only he who believes the words of the promise “has what they plainly say, the forgiveness of sins”, as we confess in the catechism. He has it the very moment he believes and as long as he continues in the faith; but he loses it when he loses faith.

And, of course, we have talked in previous sermons about how faith comes. We confess that “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Lord, keep us in this faith! Amen.