

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Seventh Sunday After Trinity, July 19, 2026

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

Hymns: 373:1-4, 377:1, 375, 382, 381:3.

Lessons: Nehemiah 1:1-11, Ephesians 2:1-9, Luke 19:1-10.

Sermon Text: Romans 4:1-8.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Do you know how blessed you are? Do you know how fortunate you are? In the words of the world, who does not realize all gifts come from God, do you know how “lucky”: you are? You know that God has forgiven your sins. Is that because you have done good deeds? No, not at all. Paul asks the Roman Christians: *“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?”* That he was justified because of his works or good deeds? Of course not! If he were justified by his works, he’d have something to boast about. But Abraham believed, and it was credited to him for righteousness. Today let us consider

**“BLESSED ARE THEY WHOSE TRANSGRESSIONS ARE FORGIVEN,
WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED.”**

1. This is never because they obey the Laws of God.
2. This is always because of faith -- believing in God.

Paul has been talking to the Roman Christians, making comparisons between Jews and Gentiles. He asked the question ‘did the Jews have any special advantage?’ He had said at the beginning of his book that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles. It was to the Jews that God made his promises. It was to the Jews that Jesus, the Son of God was first sent, as one of their own people. And the Jews were the children of Abraham, and took great pride in their bloodlines back to Abraham.

Today we are talking about that central doctrine of Christianity: Justification by faith, without the deeds of the Law. God declares you righteous, holy, sinless. He does this because the deeds of the Law were fulfilled by Jesus Christ, His only son. He does this out of love for sinful man. In the Augsburg Confession, we confess: “We teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Romans chapters 3 and 4.”

Words like “justified”, “righteousness” and “imputed” are not normally part of our daily vocabulary. But they are essential to our daily living and our eternal life. We know what they mean. We use them Sunday after Sunday, and it is good to review exactly what they mean. The word “righteousness” means goodness, perfection; it means ‘being good’. Can we be good by ourselves, without God’s help? Of course not. The believer in Christ is constantly fighting against the devil, the world, and our flesh every moment of every day. We need goodness, and righteousness and purity before we can stand righteous before God. We don’t have it. But God “justifies” us. What that means is that God chalks it up to our account. He says ‘OK, I am going to declare that you are righteous, that you are good, that you are holy. How does he justify us? That New Testament word ‘justify’ has the picture of a judge standing up there looking at someone who IS guilty. But do you know what the judge says instead of “GUILTY!”?

He justifies us, and says ‘you are not guilty’. Even more, ‘you are innocent of all the wickedness and sins you have committed.’ That is what God, the judge, does for us. He looks at every human being and says: ‘You are innocent because of what my son Jesus Christ did.’ That is the justification of all humans. That is what we call Universal Justification, or Objective Justification. God has declared the sins of all men washed away. He has declared all NOT GUILTY, INNOCENT. Scripture does not teach the false doctrine of some, even some liberal Lutherans, who teach that ‘Jesus Christ died only for those who are saved’, or that ‘God justifies ONLY those who are saved, or will come to faith’. The universal justification of Scripture teaches that ***‘God was in Christ reconciling THE WORLD unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them’***, (2 Corinthians 5:19) not accusing them of their sins. That is objective or universal justification; that God the judge stands and says that all men are not guilty. Jesus died for the sins of all men.

But how did that knowledge get to be yours? How did that precious message become yours? That is what we call Subjective Justification. Our text says ***‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’*** It is through believing what God says that justification becomes yours. It is through faith in God that he will wash away our sins for Jesus sake, that the knowledge of Universal Justification becomes your own personal, subjective justification. It becomes something for YOU. It is not just an abstract fact or idea, but personal justification means YOU, through faith, believe that God will forgive all of your sins in thought, word, and deed; not because of your own works or good deeds, or because of who you are or what you have done, but for the sake of Jesus Christ. That is the very picture that Paul makes abundantly clear today. He asks ‘what about Abraham, our forefather?’ There were some Jewish Christians in the Roman congregation, too; Jews who could take pride in the fact that they were physically children of Abraham. Before the Jewish Christians had come to faith in Jesus Christ, they were counting on their obeying the laws of Moses to get into heaven. But Paul says ***‘If in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. What does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and He counted it unto him as righteousness.’***

If you work for someone, he OWES you. If you do a job for someone, he owes you, and it is an obligation on the employer’s part. Wages are something that must be paid for the work. But, if someone gives you something, it is a GIFT. He is not obligated to give you anything. So if Abraham was justified by his works, or deeds, then God OWED him. Then Abraham had something to pat himself on the back about and to boast about: ‘Well, God, I have been a good person. I have circumcised my family, I was ready to sacrifice my son Isaac. I am a good person. You owe it to me to say my sins are forgiven.’ Paul is saying IF, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about.

But it was not those things at all that justified Abraham. It was NOT because of those things that God told Abraham that he was righteous. In Genesis 15, Abram (later to be called Abraham) was upset because he had no children. God told him to count the stars, if he could, and that would be the number of his offspring. Then Genesis 15:6 says ***“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”*** Long before Isaac was even born! Long before the covenant of circumcision! Generations before Moses gave the Law on Mount Sinai! What came first? It was NOT Abraham’s following the law, or doing good works! It was faith in God.

That shoots down the idea that we have to obey the laws of the Old Testament in order to be saved! What is it that saves someone? Just as in Abraham’s case, it is faith in God, faith that God will save us from our sins

It is only by hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the Holy Ghost can work faith in people’s hearts to believe that Gospel. -- Faith that he has worked in your hearts; to believe that even though you are a sinner, God is giving you everlasting life because of what Jesus Christ did.

Even David, in Psalm 32 says ***“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him.”***

Blessed, fortunate, happy, ***“Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him.”*** Happy is the one whose sins are forgiven! And the Lord has told you that your sins are forgiven! Believing that Jesus died for their sins is what gives people the forgiveness of sins! The other part of that picture is that the Lord covers, or forgets our sins, and will not count our sins against us. Instead he counts righteousness to us. The Lord is that righteous judge who says Not Guilty! But more than that, he says Innocent, for Jesus Sake! Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.

That is the assurance we have from the Word of God, believing that Jesus died for our sins, and that the Lord will never count our sins against us. That is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians. 2: 8-9)

After telling us in Romans 1 that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation, Paul tells us how men reject God and his Word, and live horrible, wicked, Godless lives. Then he tells us in Romans chapter 3 verse 20 that ***“no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the Law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”*** In the words just before our text, Paul says (3:28) ***“we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law”***.

What does the Law teach us? First of all, it shows us our sin. We look at that mirror of the law and have to admit ‘I am guilty of breaking all those commandments.’ But you have also been blessed in that you have learned the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel that Jesus died to take your sins away. Luther had an awful lot to say about justification by faith. For years he searched for salvation, and tried to make himself holy before God. He tried to obey the laws of God, and he failed. It was only passages of Scripture such as our text that made Luther realize that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ -- Justification by faith! Luther wrote so much about that because that is the central doctrine of Christianity. If that doctrine is taken away, eternal life is taken away. If that truth is denied, there is nothing left.

You are here today hearing the message again of the justification of your sins. Do not neglect the opportunity of hearing that gospel. That gospel of Jesus Christ is what feeds our faith. If we do not feed our faith, we are in danger of losing that faith. That gospel reminds us every time we hear it of the fact that we are justified by faith in the works of Jesus Christ, and not by our own works.

May that assurance of the forgiveness of your sins from the Word of God and from the sacraments always be yours. Amen.

Reprinted from a Ministry By Mail for November 15, 1992.