

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Ninth Sunday After Trinity, August 2, 2026

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

Hymns: 40, 91:1-3, 415:1-3, 586:1-4, 47.

Lessons: Genesis 15:1-6, Romans 3:21-4:8, John 8:48-58.

Sermon Text: Romans 4:8-12.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dearly Beloved in Christ, our Redeemer:

One of the biggest religious controversies of all times centers around the question: Is a person justified by his own works, or solely by faith in Jesus? Similar questions are: Does God forgive our sins because of what we have done to earn forgiveness, or because of what Jesus did for us? Does God count us righteous because of our works, or because of Jesus' works?

The answers to these questions are not difficult to find in the Bible, and the Bible teaching is crystal clear. In two passages in the third chapter of Romans we have it stated: ***"No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law."*** And we ***"are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*** Rom. 3:20,24

The trouble is that man through the centuries has refused to accept the clear words of Scripture. Man's mind by nature is perverse and hostile to God. His way of thinking is contrary to God's way of thinking. St. Paul says: ***"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."*** I Cor. 2:14 Thus the heathen religion of salvation by works is found widespread throughout the world. Comparatively few people know the beautiful, soul-satisfying teaching of justification by faith in Jesus.

We are among those privileged few, and today for the strengthening of our faith we want to learn of:

THE BLESSEDNESS OF NOT HAVING OUR SINS COUNTED AGAINST US BY THE LORD.

1. **We are righteous because God does not count our sins against us for Jesus' sake.**
2. **This is proved from the example of Abraham who was counted righteous, not by works, but by faith in Jesus.**

Our text begins with a quotation from Psalm 32: ***"Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."*** (verse 2) The first fact that has to be acknowledged is that we do sin. God does not count us righteous because we have not sinned. We were born in sin as children of sinful parents. Job asks: ***"Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!"*** Job 14:4 Likewise, the Book of Proverbs poses a question we all should answer: ***"Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?'"*** Prov. 20:9 We have sinned often and grievously, and we continue to sin day after day. Whatever way we want to express it, it is true that we have sinned; we have missed the mark; we have transgressed God's holy commandments; we have been guilty of committing iniquities and trespasses and we have been doing contrary to God's Law. The Bible says: ***"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."*** I John 3:4 We haven't paid attention to what God says, but have done as we pleased. Isaiah wrote: ***"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."*** Is. 53:6

Because of this, we deserve only God's anger. In no sense do we deserve God's mercy and goodness. There has been no moral change in us so that we can say, 'Now we have improved and changed for the better and no longer deserve God's wrath.' The plain, unvarnished truth is that we deserve the punishment of hell forever

and ever. God is a holy God and we deserve His anger. He has the right to say about us as He once said about Israel through Jeremiah: ***“Should I not punish them for this?”*** Jer. 5:29

How, then, can God count us righteous? It is only because God does not count our sins against us. He is aware of each sin we have committed. Our sins stand out like a crimson color. Yet, God does not count our sins against us. This is true blessedness. This is what it really means to be in a state of blessedness or happiness. ***“Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”***

But there is a very good reason for this. God does not count our sins against us for Jesus' sake. The Bible says: ***“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. ... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** 2 Cor. 5:19,21 God sent His Son as our Divine Substitute. Jesus came to earth to take our place under the Law. He was subject to all of God's commandments and He kept all of them without ever committing a sin. And, in addition to living a perfectly holy life for us, the Lord Jesus took our place and suffered the full measure of God's anger because of our sin. ***“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*** I John 2:2 As John the Baptist said, so we say: ***“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”*** John 1:29

The assurance that God really does no longer count our sins against us is given in some of the most comforting passages of the Bible. ***“He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ... As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”*** Ps. 103:10,12 The prophet Micah said: ***“You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”*** 7:18-19.

The justification of the sinner, then, is this: Instead of being like an angry judge and pronouncing a sentence of punishment upon us, God looks upon Jesus' righteousness and declares us righteous for Jesus' sake. You will note that good works do not enter the picture at all in man's justification. It is all something given to us as a free gift of God's love for Jesus' sake.

This, now, Paul proves in our text from the example of Abraham. Abraham was counted righteous, not by works, but by faith in Jesus.

2.

Before we hear the words of our text in this matter, we have to remember the great emphasis most people put on their own works. Most people believe that they can at least partly earn their salvation by what they do. The Jews, who so bitterly opposed Paul's preaching of the Gospel, boasted that they were Abraham's children and boasted of the fact that they were circumcised. So Paul asks in our text: ***“Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?”*** Or, in other words, is a person counted righteous in God's sight because he has observed the ordinances of the Law of God (like circumcision), or is a person counted righteous by faith in Jesus? Paul answers in our text: ***“We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.”*** Abraham's faith was that he believed God's promise of the coming Messiah. He believed that God would give him and his wife a son in their extreme old age, and that from his descendants the Messiah would be born, who would be the Savior of the world. Paul says: ***“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”*** Rom. 4:18 Abraham was a very old man and his wife, Sarah, was very old and had never been able to have children. Paul says: Abraham ***“did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’”*** Rom. 4:20-22

It was by such faith that Abraham accepted God's promise and the righteousness of that coming Savior was credited to him. Works had nothing to do with it. The fact that Abraham obeyed God's command to be circumcised is not the reason he was counted righteous. This Paul proves most conclusively by asking in our text: ***“Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before.”*** It was, in fact, 14 years before Abraham was circumcised that he had already accepted God's promise

of the coming Savior by faith. Righteousness, therefore, was credited to him by faith, not by his works. So it is also with us and everybody else in this world. What we do in trying to observe God's commandments is neither the basis nor the condition of our being counted righteous in God's sight. Paul in our text now explains what purpose the circumcision served. ***"He (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."*** Circumcision was a seal, a pledge of God, like God saying that the righteousness God had declared upon Abraham by faith was truly genuine. In a similar way, God has given the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper to us in the New Testament as a seal and assurance that the forgiveness of sins pronounced to us in the Gospel is truly genuine.

Finally, in our text Paul speaks of Abraham as the father of all true believers in Christ. He says: ***"So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."*** Abraham is the father of all believers in Christ. God had told him: ***"Look up at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."*** Gen. 15:5-6. When Abraham was 99 years old, the Lord repeated his promise: ***"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."*** Gen. 17:4.5 Therefore, if we believe in Christ as our Righteousness as Abraham did, then we are the children of Abraham and he is our father, even though we are Gentiles. And all Jews today too, who trust in Jesus as their Savior, are truly children of Abraham. In that way they, as our text says, ***"walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."***

Unbelieving Jews are not children of Abraham, nor are they heirs of the promises Abraham accepted by faith. They cannot they be called God's people. We are the true children of Abraham, because we by the grace of God believe God's promise of salvation in Christ.

Let there be, then, no doubt whatsoever in our minds that we are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus, and in such faith let us confess:

*"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head."* Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 371, v. 1)

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