

Justified in Christ Alone!

‡ the death of sin (vv.11-16)
‡ by grace through faith (vv.17-21)

In the name of God's Son our Savior, dearly loved of God:

Weird things can happen waking up. Let's say you're lying there praying for God's grace on another day. You're asking for a servant's heart to serve God nobly. You want *to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*" (Micah 6:8 NIV84) You just want to be a blessing this day.

Then a strange beat starts to pound through your prayer. It's the alarm tuned to some unknown station. As the volume increases the words the man is singing become more clear: "Ain't nobody tell me nuthin." That's "poetic license" ripping on the English language and human pride perverting the soul.

Sometime you feel like a Ping-Pong ball bouncing back and forth between depression and pride. Today's Scripture readings reach us wherever we are between these two extremes because we all know both of them. My fellow forgiven sinners, God's got you covered in grace – **Justified in Christ Alone!**

‡ the death of sin (vv.11-16)

Look at the *First Reading. King David pronounced his own death sentence when the Prophet Nathan used an emotional word picture on him. As a former shepherd, to hear that some rich man stole his neighbor's lamb and slaughtered it for a guest, why that would deserve death! "*You are the man.*" Nathan told David. By committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband Uriah the Hittite, David earned God's wrath for himself. He could not hide his crimes. David needed **the death of sin**.

In the **Gospel God the Holy Spirit takes us to the home of a Pharisee who had the opposite problem. Since he had never murdered anyone or committed adultery, he looked down on the sinful woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. Pouring expensive perfume on Jesus only made the self-righteous Pharisee more upset, talking to himself. As God, Jesus could read his thoughts and help him see the woman's faith-born love in God's forgiveness. The Pharisee needed **the death of sin** in his work-righteousness. The woman was already dying inside.

That's where our text from the Second Lesson takes us to the confrontation between Paul and Peter. For a long time, Peter was as healthy inside as the sinful woman because he could remember how he denied knowing Jesus, how Jesus forgave him and reinstated him as an apostle. Peter was personally enjoying the freedom of sins-forgiven. He had already suffered **the death of sin** and now could live in God's grace. This showed openly in the way he ate with Gentiles, no longer worried about dietary laws.

Then came the Pharisees, or at least Christian Jews from Jerusalem living like Jews. It's okay to eat however you want. If you're raised on certain kinds of food, it's hard to change later in life. But Peter started to pull back and stop eating with the non-Jew Gentiles, as if they were sinning by not obeying the old Law of Moses. God gave His people of Israel dietary laws to build a fence around them as His holy people. The ancient Jews were set apart for God's purpose of sending the world's Savior through them. But now Jesus has come. He has fulfilled all God's laws by living a perfect life in our place. Since Jesus died as our Substitute, His innocent blood washes away our **death of sin**. To give in to fear as Peter did, acting as if you become holy by doing good works is to deny that salvation is won and done. Jesus said, "*It is finished.*" (John 19:30) Not by works, we are **Justified in Christ alone**.

✠ by grace through faith (vv.17-21)

Fortunately Peter did not wake up each morning singing, “Ain’t nobody tell me nuthin.” He listened to Paul’s admonition as seen from his two epistles on God’s gift of full and free forgiveness. Peter commends Paul’s writings: *“So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.”* (2 Peter 3:14–16 NIV84) Listen as Paul speaks God’s Word.

Peter accepted Paul lecturing him in front of everyone else. Peter’s hypocrisy led astray other brothers including Barnabas, Paul’s mission partner. Paul exposed Peter’s sin of work-righteousness: *“If you, a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, why do you compel the Gentiles to live like the Jews?”*¹ Outsiders criticize Christians for being hypocrites, and Peter proves sometimes we are. But so are those who refuse to listen to God’s Word as if they know better, the self-righteous who see no sin of their own, only the sins of others. Listening to a harsh rebuke can rescue us **by grace through faith**.

Peter listened as Paul went on: *“We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. ¹⁶We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also believed in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. ¹⁷But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were also found to be sinners, then is Christ a servant of sin? Certainly not!”*

Jews called Gentiles “sinners” because they lived outside the Law of Moses. Sometimes the Jews missed their own sins that way – like Paul, back when he was known as Saul the Pharisee. He thought he could keep God’s Law well enough for God to be pleased with him. Paul had been self-righteous too.

Ask yourself and your self-righteous friends: *Have you ever taken something that wasn’t yours?* Everyone has to answer honestly, “Yes.” Then you are a thief. *Have you ever lusted for someone who’s not your spouse?* Jesus calls that adultery which God says must be punished. *Have you ever taken God’s Name in vain?* Again, all must answer, “Yes.” Here we’ve already broken three of God’s Commandments when only breaking one could damn us. God says, people who live like this cannot inherit the kingdom of God; they can’t go to heaven. Since no one can keep God’s Law perfectly, *“no one will be justified by the works of the law.”* Jesus did not excuse sin; He washed it clean with the only working cleanser – innocent blood, His own. Jesus justifies sinners because He died for all. Have **faith** in His forgiveness.

Paul tactfully takes the spotlight off Peter and reveals his own self-righteous past: *“In fact, if I build up again those things that I destroyed, I bring on myself the judgment of being a lawbreaker. ¹⁹Indeed, through the law I died to the law that I might live for God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not regard the grace of God as nothing. As a matter of fact, if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!”*

Justified in Christ Alone! we are set free from crippling fear that we have not done enough for God. Instead of the arrow pointing up with our works, God’s Holy Bible points the arrow down with Christ’s works for us as our Substitute. God’s Law can only condemn you for not being perfect and holy like God as He demands. But in your Baptism you were buried with Christ to rise with Him to a new life of gratitude and joy. It feels like dying to say, “No!” to our sinful desires, or to good things outside our calling. Gratitude crucifies self daily in thanks to God for His gift of holiness. Here in the death of Christ I live! *“Christ died for all”* – even for me! *“I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Be at peace with God and each other – **Justified in Christ Alone!** Amen.

¹ EHV ~ Evangelical Heritage Version (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle. For *The Preacher’s Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net. New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife. 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126