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Festival of the Reformation
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Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Romans 3:19-28

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,
that is, apart from the commandments and moral standards that God demands.
There are commandments and moral standards.
They have not been eliminated and they also show God's righteousness.
They show His justice and morality.

What they do not show is any way that enables *us* to be righteous or please God.
All have sinned and fallen short of God's righteousness.
Despite the Law's inability to make us righteous,
it does show us the righteousness of God.
It is a righteousness that threatens, accuses, and even instructs sinners.

Fortunately for us, as St. Paul points out, and as Blessed Martin made abundantly clear:
the righteousness of God has also been manifested *apart* from that law.
God put Christ Jesus forward as a propitiation by His blood.
The benefit of that blood is received by faith in order to show God's righteousness.
This is not the righteousness that demands and accuses,
but it is the righteousness that God gives away as a gift.
It is called the righteousness of God because it belongs to God and He gives it.

This righteousness has been shown to us apart from the law.
It was shown apart from the law when God passed over sins,
sparing those who were shielded by the blood of lamb.
It was shown when He blamed the scape-goat for the sins of the people
and banished the goat to die in the wilderness.
It was shown when He graciously provided manna in the desert,
when He caused the walls of Jericho to collapse,
and when He sent down fire on the prophets of Baal.
It's not arbitrary or accidental that Samson finds honey in a lion's carcass.
That's a figure of the righteousness of God coming out of death apart from the law.

So the righteousness that God gives to men
is shown every time God is gracious, kind, and merciful to sinners,
when they too eat honey out of dead lions,
when the householders bring out new treasures from the storeroom,
both in the Old Testament and the New.

God is just.
He is good, moral, and upright.
His righteousness convicts and accuses those who are not good, moral, or upright.
Its purpose is not to improve our behavior or give us a way to find God.
That was what was wrong with the Pharisees and that's what's wrong with us.

Jesus offers truth and freedom in His Word and we say,

*“Thank you very much but we are Lutherans:
We already have the pure doctrine and Gospel.
And we are Americans: We are already free.”*

But Jesus says:

*“Not if you sin, not if you stand for the Gospel reading and fold your hands,
but while it’s read your mind wanders to lustful daydreams
and fantasies of gluttony and greed,
not if you can’t even pray the Lord’s prayer without thinking about other things
or tell the truth when you’re asked a simple question
but must exaggerate and spin at every turn.
For if you do those things:
if you sin, if you love yourself more than your neighbor,
then you are a slave to sin – whether American, Lutheran, or not –
just as surely as the Pharisees were before you
and you will not remain in the house forever. Repent.”*

You must be set free from your Abrahamic patrimony,
and Lutheran heritage,
and the inheritance of George Washington

if that is what deludes you into thinking that you are free.

That freedom is the demonic delusion that’s placed upon slaves to sin—no freedom at all!

But if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!

And you will remain in the house forever!

The only freedom that really matters is the kind that Jesus bestows upon those who believe Him.

Notice that I didn’t say who believe *in* Him, though we might.

To say that we believe *in* someone today means we have confidence that he’ll do what He says,
or that he’s competent to do what he’s supposed to do.

It’s often used when we don’t fully mean it:

We tell our children we believe in them when they’re trying out for the basketball team
even if we aren’t quite sure that they’ll make it.

But when we say that we *believe* someone,
we mean that we believe he’s telling the truth.

Jesus bestows freedom upon those who *believe* Him –
not upon those who think He is a good person, or exemplifies peaceful living –
but upon those who trust His Word as *true*.

For whoever abides in His Word is truly His disciple
and he will know the truth and the truth will set him free.

This is the righteousness shown apart the law.

God is the justifier. He is the forgiver of sins,
the passer-over who visits death upon His first and only-begotten Son instead of us,
and He is the way, the truth, and the life.

He says you are free, and indeed you are!
 He says you are clean, and you are!
 He says you are His friend, and you are!
 That is the truth He tells and that is what you believe.
 And through that *belief* you receive the Truth He tells.

All sin and fall short of the glory of God,
 except, of course, for the only-begotten of the Father; the Son of St. Mary.

The righteousness of God revealed *in* the law
 stands in contrast and accusation against all of our unrighteousness,
 our immorality and injustice, our selfishness and pride,
 exposing our guilt and falling short of the law's demands and expectations.

But the righteousness of God shown *apart from* the law covers sins and unrighteousness.
 It is this grace, given as a gift by God,
 that justifies you through the redemption in Christ Jesus,
 whose propitiation you receive by faith, *by believing Him*.

You hear and abide in His Word, even now.
 That's why you're here today, and that's why you'll be here next week too.
 And in this way, you've been freed by the Son; and now you are free indeed!¹

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

¹ *Many thanks to Pastor David Petersen, of Redeemer Lutheran, Fort Wayne, IN, for the substance of this sermon.