

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

He was a Pharisee of Pharisees, a student of Gamaliel, taught in the strictness of the laws of his fathers. He was a Jew, zealous toward God, a persecutor of the Christian Church. He was studied in the Torah. He knew the Law better than most. And so it is that the Words of St. Paul you heard read this night testify to a miracle.

Saul, an ethnic child of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, wasn't a true child of Abraham. For his ethnicity, although pure, did not make Him Abraham's son. Those are sons of Abraham who have the faith of Abraham. Abraham rejoiced to see the Day of Christ, and he saw it, and was glad, although he was gathered to his fathers 2000 years before the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. In faith he confessed to Isaac, the son to be sacrificed, "God will provide for Himself the Lamb." St. Paul is a true son of Abraham because he too came to believe that God provided for Himself the Lamb, not a ram caught in a thicket, but a willing, spotless Divine Lamb. So St. Paul writes, as you heard this night, that a righteous of God apart from the Law is being revealed, to which the Law and the Prophets witness.

So learn from the Apostle. The Law is not unrelated to righteousness. The Law describes righteousness. The Law demands righteousness. The Law condemns every word, every act, every thought, no matter how fleeting, that is not righteous. So the Law is related to righteousness. The Law testifies to righteousness.

But the Law could never make one righteous. Abraham did many amazing works. But he was not righteous because of his works. Consider too Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the saints of old. They did amazing works, even miraculous works. Through several of them God wrote Holy Scripture. But they were not saved by their works. For none of them were righteous of and by themselves. And the Law can make no one righteous.

So when St. Paul writes that a righteousness apart from the Law is made known, being witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets, it is a miraculous confession, a life-changing confession. The Law is related to righteousness, but it cannot make one righteous. It can only accuse. But it does witness to righteousness. It bears testimony that righteousness is possible. And that testimony is shared by the Prophets.

That testimony is shared by Moses, who promised that God would raise up a Prophet like him from among his brethren. That testimony is shared by Solomon, as His Proverbs testify to the Incarnate Wisdom of God. That testimony is shared by David, as the shepherd king of Israel writes of the Lord who is the Shepherd that restores souls.

That testimony is shared by Isaiah, as he foretells the One by whose stripes you are healed. That testimony is shared by Jeremiah, who prophesied the institution of a New Testament, in which God forgives transgressions and remembers sin no more. But none of them testify that the works of the Law will justify. Indeed, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

The righteousness to which the Law and the Prophets testify is a miraculous righteousness, a righteousness by which you receive the forgiveness of your sins, a righteousness by which you are declared holy and pure, without spot or blemish, sinless and chaste and upright before God, a righteousness imputed to fallen men, freely, by grace through faith.

So for you, dear Christian, the Apostle's Words are the sweetest Gospel. For there is no difference, he writes, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. St. Paul sinned. Abraham sinned. Isaac and Jacob sinned. Moses sinned. Solomon and David and Isaiah and Jeremiah sinned. You have sinned. And according to the Law, death is required, for the wages of sin is death.

Still Abraham saw His day and was glad. Abraham saw that God would provide the Lamb. And there, on that altar of wood, there, on Golgotha, the willing Son, the spotless Lamb shed His Blood for the forgiveness of your sins, that God remember them no more. And there, from that garden tomb, did the Lord of Life take up His life again, that believing in Him you receive forgiveness and life.

Although you have fallen short of the glory of God, you are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as propitiation by His Blood, through faith. So hear the Apostle's Gospel proclamation: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law." Thanks be to God. In Christ, you have hope. In Christ, you have forgiveness and life. In Christ you are free.

So it was that 500 years ago, in His mercy, God worked through a German Augustinian Monk to free His Church, long held in the Babylonian Captivity of romish doctrine. God worked through the Words of St. Paul to the Romans: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation unto all who believe... for in it a righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

Through those Words, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in love God returned the pure Gospel to His Church. And that is the Gospel that you hear this night, the only Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, risen and ascended for your salvation. So he who has ears, let him hear. Hear and believe, dear Christian; hear and believe, and be a true child of Abraham.

Hear and believe and worship the Prophet promised by Moses, the Prophet raised up on the cross. Hear and believe, and know Christ, the Power and Wisdom of God, the Master Craftsman through whom all things were made. Hear and believe, and hearken to the voice of the Good Shepherd. Hear and believe, that what the Suffering Servant won be imputed to you. Hear and believe, the Word of God that stands forever.

Hear and believe, and it is credited unto you as righteousness. Hear and believe, and confess Christ. Confess that the Holy Scripture is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, and the Book of Concord of 1580 is a proper exposition of those Scriptures – not because in parts it contains Scripture, but because in its entirety it is the finest Confession of the Biblical faith ever written.

Here and believe, and be bold to confess with Fr. Luther "Here I stand." And hear and believe, take and eat, take and drink of the Body and Blood that bring the benefits of the New Testament to you. For in Christ, you are free.