

Sunday Lesson – October 31, 2021

GOSPEL: Romans 3: 19 - 28

"We're All in the Same Sinking Boat"



Context

"The opening verses in our passage summarize what Paul has been saying up to this point in chapters two and three. Paul stresses that humanity has no claim whatsoever on God. Both Greeks and Jews stand accused by the law. The former know the law as it is "written on their hearts" (2:15) while the latter fall short of the law revealed to the people of Israel. Note carefully that the law is not the problem. Paul underlines that the law itself is good (7:12). But it is our tendency (sin) to use what is good to promote our own agenda that is the problem. In doing this we reveal the depth of our rebellion." (Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/reformation-day/commentary-on-romans-319-28-3)

Insight

"It is easy to pass over the small words of Scripture and count them as having little value. We prefer to unpack the big terms that are loaded with theological freight, like "justification" and "righteousness". However, Paul is making a big shift in our passage as he transitions from futility of the human situation to what God is doing to address the problem.

BUT NOW (3:21) says Paul, God is doing something new. That little word "now" deserves some attention. Paul is directing our attention to the present tense. This is echoed latter in the section when he says "...they are *now* justified by his grace" (3:24) and "it was to prove at the *present* time that he himself is righteous" (3:26, underlining mine).

In other words, we are not dealing merely with something that God has done in the past. This is not a glance back to a "once upon a time." It is certainly not merely a history lesson. Paul's

point is that right now, this very moment, God is declaring something to us that we need to hear. In other words, this is a message that connects with peoples' lives as they live today." (Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-30-2/commentary-on-mark-1046-52-2)

Gospel Reading

"So where does that put us? Do we Jews get a better break than the others? Not really. Basically, all of us, whether insiders or outsiders, start out in identical conditions, which is to say that we all start out as sinners. Scripture leaves no doubt about it:

There's nobody living right, not even one,
nobody who knows the score, nobody alert for God.

They've all taken the wrong turn;
they've all wandered down blind alleys.

No one's living right;
I can't find a single one.

Their throats are gaping graves,
their tongues slick as mudslides.

Every word they speak is tinged with poison.

They open their mouths and pollute the air.
They race for the honor of sinner-of-the-year,
litter the land with heartbreak and ruin,
Don't know the first thing about living with others.

They never give God the time of day.

This makes it clear, doesn't it, that whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says *about others* but *to us* to whom these Scriptures were addressed in the first place! And it's clear enough, isn't it, that we're sinners, every one of us, in the same sinking boat with everybody else? Our involvement with God's revelation doesn't put us right with God. What it does is force us to face our complicity in everyone else's sin. But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who

believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public—to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured. This is not only clear, but it's *now*—this is current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in his rightness. So where does that leave our proud Jewish insider claims and counterclaims? Canceled? Yes, canceled. What we've learned is this: God does not respond to what we do; we respond to what *God* does. We've finally figured it out. Our lives get in step with God and all others by letting him set the pace, not by proudly or anxiously trying to run the parade." The Message

What It Could Mean?

"Of all the reasons Paul might have written to the Roman house churches, addressing the polarization in the community is clearly a priority for him. Paul's approach is to stun "both sides" of a division into silence, in the hopes of resetting relationships and moving church communities toward greater righteousness through unity (rather than compounding factionalism).

Paul uses law and gospel to demonstrate this polarity. The law reveals the lack of human righteousness; in contrast, the gospel narrates the manifestation of God's righteousness in Christ. If the law does indeed produce a silence, that silence ought not to be left a void; for Paul—the law silences, and the gospel narrates.

Beginning with Chapter 3, Paul finally starts speaking in inclusive, unified terms ("our," "we" and "us" finally appear). Into the silence Paul has created, he now narrates the unity of the community, and the unifying factor is humanity's lack of righteousness.

As real as the unrighteousness of humanity is—that is how real the gift of God's grace is, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." In the very real midst of profound human depravity, Paul recognizes and describes the just-as-real righteousness of God." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by René Such Schreiner*)

Readings for Further Study

- Romans 7:7 *Without the law we would not know sin*
- Galatians 2:6; 3:5 *"not justified by works of the law but through faith"*
- Galatians 2:21 *"If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing"*

Thought for the Day

"The law says, 'do this,' and it is never done. Grace says, 'believe in this,' and everything is already done." ~ Martin Luther

A Prayer

"Waken our hearts, O Lord, our God; make them ever watchful to serve You and Your purposes. Trouble us with the smallness of our vision and work. Trouble us with the greatness of Your command to make disciples of all nations. Trouble us with Your great love for sinners and our own slowness to make You our greatest love. Trouble us with the brevity of our lives and time, talent, and treasure not invested in eternity. Comfort us by drawing us to Yourself with the cords of Your unfailing mercy. Comfort us, O Lord, with the assurance of our salvation and unending glory with You when we suffer and are afflicted. Rekindle in us a renewed desire for the coming of Your glorious kingdom when all wrongs will be made right, when everything that is broken will be made whole, and when we will trade a cross for a crown. In Jesus' name we pray." **Amen.** ~ *Prayer of Confession – Reformation Sunday (Martin Luther)*