

**IF YOU SAY SO**  
**Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent, 2020**  
**Romans 4:1-8, 13-17**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before, Romans 4:1-8, 13-17: <sup>1</sup> **Therefore, what shall we say that Abraham, the ancestor of our race, has found?** <sup>2</sup> **For, if Abraham was justified by works, he had something about which to boast. However, he could not boast before God.** <sup>3</sup> **For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”** <sup>4</sup> **When a person works, his wages are not credited as grace but as a debt.** <sup>5</sup> **However, to the person who, instead of working, believes in God, who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.** <sup>6</sup> **In the same way, David also speaks about the blessedness of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:** <sup>7</sup> **“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered!** <sup>8</sup> **Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will certainly not credit his sin!” ...**

<sup>13</sup> **It was not through the Law that Abraham or his descendants received the promise that he would be the heir of the world but through the righteousness of faith.** <sup>14</sup> **For, if those who belong to the Law are the heirs, then faith has been made worthless, and the promise has been made ineffective.** <sup>15</sup> **For the Law works God’s anger, and where there is no Law there is no transgression either.**

<sup>16</sup> **Therefore, the promise belongs to faith, that it may be according to grace, that the promise may be sure to all Abraham’s descendants, not only to those who belong to the Law but also to those who belong to the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all,** <sup>17</sup> **as the Scriptures have said, “I have made you the father of many nations.” He is our father in the presence of God, in whom he believed, the God who makes the dead live and calls what does not exist into existence.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“If you say so.” That is a simple, four-worded phrase on which much depends, especially if this is a response made to someone with more authority than yourself, someone, for example, like your boss.

If your boss was to tell you to carry out a job he has given you in a certain way, but you know of a better, more efficient way to carry out your work, you may say something like, *“Excuse me, but if I do my job the way you just said, the following problems will arise: this, this, and this. Don’t you think it would be better if I did it this other way instead?”* and maybe the boss will agree with you. However, it doesn’t always work that way. Sometimes the boss will expect things done his way, and will not enter into a discussion about doing things any other way. Even if the way the boss wants things done doesn’t make any sense to you, defying all logic or reason, since he is the boss, the one in charge, all you can say is, *“If you say so.”*

The same can be said wherever there’s someone in charge: in corporations, factories, businesses, schools, and even in the family. Take the last example: Dad and Mum are in charge. Period. So when children feel the need to practice their skills as budding lawyers by asking over and over again, *“But why, Mum, why do we have to do it?”* the best answer is very often *“Because I’m your mother and I said so!”* Done. That’s the end of the discussion, saving countless hours of needless stalling, whining, and negotiation - all of which are designed to undermine the authority of the parent in charge. Don’t go down that road. Teach your children to be good kids who say: *“Yes, Mum. If you say so.”* In a case like that, it’s easy to see that the person in charge has experience and access to information far beyond that of the underlings. Parents do know better than their children; that’s why God has put them in charge.

That brings us to today’s Second Lesson from Romans, the Apostle Paul’s great explanation and defence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here, we have a section which comes from chapter four, but to fully appreciate what Paul is saying here, we need to back up and review how he has been building the argument up to this point.

In a nutshell, Paul begins by showing that the wrath of God is being poured out from heaven against all mankind for our sin and rebellion against Him. There is no one who is innocent. The people of God, who were the Jews in Paul’s day, had the commandments that God had given Moses. They knew what God had demanded of them and that they had failed to measure up to His perfect standards of behaviour. Other people, Gentiles, didn’t have God’s commandments; but they did have laws. They understood the difference between right and wrong and knew as well that at least some of the things they did were evil. So, whether someone had God’s commands or not, it really didn’t make any difference: they were still

sinners, sinners who cannot stand in the Judgment. God will condemn them. Only the righteous will be received by the Lord into Paradise. Paul uses this to demonstrate the futility of trying to make oneself righteous by means of the Law. The Law can only condemn. It can only show us our sin.

Paul then goes on to explain that God has prepared another way for people to be righteous. It's not by keeping the Law; rather, it's by believing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ: the truth that God has sent His only Son into this world to live a perfect life in mankind's place; and then to take the world's sins on Himself, to bear them to the cross, and there to suffer and die as the perfect substitute sacrifice. In this way, the wrath and justice of God are both satisfied. Jesus keeps the Law for us - that makes God happy. He's condemned for sin in our place - that ensures the Law against sin is kept. Jesus does it all. Now we can be righteous in God's sight not by doing what the Law says, but rather by having faith in what Jesus has done. It's a righteousness not of doing, but of believing.

If we have been closely following Paul's discussion, at this point, we may think, "*Wait. Let's see if we have got this straight: even though we are sinners who do all kinds of unrighteous things that offend God, He nevertheless declares us to be righteous when we trust in Jesus and what He's done for our salvation. That doesn't make any sense. How can God say we are righteous when we know full well that we are sinners?*" To such thinking, Paul would respond, "*Well, consider who it is that's making the declaration: it's the Lord. When He says something, it's true. Don't fight it. Don't argue with it. Don't try to reason with it. When God says, we are righteous by faith in Jesus, believe it. We say, 'if you say so,' because if God says it, it is so.*"

Paul knew that his Jewish readers, in particular, were going to have trouble with this concept. After all, they had God's revealed Word. They had the Law God had handed down to Moses at Sinai, and they were pretty much addicted to the idea that they could keep it somehow well enough to be considered righteous on their own. Paul had successfully torpedoed that idea and sunk it, but it was hard for them to let it go and receive this radical new idea of being righteous by faith in Jesus. So to convince them, Paul pulled the preacher's trump card on them. He pointed them to the Word of God, showing them what it actually said, and demonstrating that this radically new idea of being righteous by faith isn't new at all, but it was what God had been saying all along.

He starts with the story of Abram, who was later renamed, Abraham. This is important because the Jews revered him. To them, theologically speaking, Abraham was even more important than Moses. We heard the story of Abraham's call in today's First Lesson. From those words, what the Jews would have pointed to was Abraham's absolute obedience. When God called Abraham and told him to leave his land and relatives and head out to the Promised Land, he did what he was told.<sup>1</sup> The Jews believed Abraham was righteous in the sight of God because he was obedient, and, since they were his children, they could be too.

Paul made it clear that that is not what the Scripture says. When Abraham was called by the LORD, he was given many wonderful promises. The LORD had said He would make of him a great nation, bless him, make his name great, and bless all nations on earth through him - which means he would bring the Saviour into the world through his descendants. The LORD also promised to give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham. Trusting in these promises, Abraham went - even though it really didn't make a lot of sense. Why? Because when the LORD had called him, Abraham was 75 years old. His wife, Sarah, was 65. Maybe they had already been married for fifty years, and even though they had done very well for themselves, having flocks and herds and servants and money,<sup>2</sup> yet they didn't have any children - the one thing they had longed for the most - to hold a son in their achingly empty arms.

That's why they went. Being promised by the LORD that they would have many descendants, this meant that they first had to have a son. They believed that the LORD would give them one. It wasn't obedience that led Abraham out of where he was living to go to Canaan; *it was faith: faith in a promised son.*

However, the LORD didn't give him one; not at first, anyway. After they'd been living for ten years in Canaan, there was still no sign of Sarah becoming pregnant. Apparently when they left, they still considered it a remote possibility. Now, however, since Sarah was 75 years old, all indications of fertility had long since ceased. Abraham was heartbroken. He believed that the LORD God had let him down, and figured that the only way to make the promise come true would be for him to adopt his head servant Eliezer of Damascus.<sup>3</sup> Then, at least in a legal sense if not biologically, he'd have a son, and through that son, he could have many descendants. Maybe Abraham even felt that he had been deceived by God.

That's when the Word of the LORD appeared to him and told him to stop doubting. He told Abraham to forget about the

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 12:1-4

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 13:2

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 15:3

adoption. He said, *“This man will not be your heir, but one who comes from your own body will be your heir”* and then told Abraham to step outside and try to count the stars - impossible because they are so numerous. The Lord said, *“Your offspring will be like them!”* (Genesis 15:4-5).

Now, that made even less sense than before! It was against reason. It was against logic. It was against nature, but it was what God had said, and so it would be. So Paul writes, <sup>3</sup> **“For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’** It wasn’t what Abraham did that had made him righteous in the sight of God; it was what he had believed - namely in the child of promise God would later give to him through whom an even greater Child of Promise would come.

To press the point home, Paul then speaks of David, another great hero of the Jews. He says, <sup>6</sup> **“In the same way, David also speaks about the blessedness of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered! <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will certainly not credit his sin!’ ...”**<sup>4</sup>

David was the shepherd boy who had killed Goliath.<sup>5</sup> He had become a great king, unified the nation, and destroyed many enemies. Surely his deeds made him a righteous man. No! David was also an adulterer and murderer. David knew very well that he was a wretched sinner in the sight of God, which is why he didn’t write in the psalm, *“Blessed is the man who obeys the Lord perfectly,”* but rather **“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered! <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will certainly not credit his sin!”** David understood that it wasn’t his *doing* that had made him righteous before God, but his *believing* in what God had done for him to take away his sin.

Paul caps the argument by explaining that if there is any hope of salvation for us, it has to be this way. He says, <sup>13</sup> **“It was not through the Law that Abraham or his descendants received the promise that he would be the heir of the world but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For, if those who belong to the Law are the heirs, then faith has been made worthless, and the promise has been made ineffective.”** No one keeps the Law, and besides, as Paul says, **“the Law works God’s anger.”** But if righteousness and salvation are matters to be obtained by grace through faith, then they’re available to everyone who hears the Gospel and believes what God has done in Christ to save us. That is how God shows His great love and mercy: by sending His Child of Promise to work salvation for us. We receive that salvation when we hear and believe the Good News. God says we are righteous by faith in Christ. We respond: *“Yes, Lord. If you say so.”*

If only all Christians would respond this way, because, sadly, not all do. Some will attend church every Sunday, participate in the liturgy, confess their sins, hear the readings and sermon, take communion, and so on. But unfortunately, they understand that doing all that is what makes one righteous in God’s sight. They are Christian because they act like Christians. But it often happens that when such people commit a terrible sin, one that weighs heavily on their conscience, they will stop going to church. They say, *“I’ve done a terrible thing, and now I can’t bear going back to church.”* That is sad and misses the point entirely, but it is a situation far from unique. So many within the church, who are surrounded by the message of the Gospel, and who participate in the Sacraments that Christ has given for our assurance, still don’t believe. People look into the face of Jesus and see judgment. They imagine hearing Jesus saying to them, *“After all that I’ve done for you, that’s how you repay Me? How dare you come in here? Get out!”* Such people are using their own reason and logic. They use what makes sense according to nature.

The trouble with this is that people don’t listen to or believe what Jesus has actually said: *“Father, forgive them! For they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34). *“I have not come to call righteous people, but sinners, to repentance”* (Luke 5:32). *“Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden; and I shall give you rest!”* *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.”*<sup>17</sup> *“For God has not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world may be saved through Him”* (John 3:16-17). Nor do they believe what Jesus was continuing to say to them through the minister: *“I forgive you all your sins.”* *“Take, eat. This is My body given for you. Take, drink. This is My blood shed for the forgiveness of your sins.”* Such people cannot simply say, *“Yes Lord, if you say so.”*

May it never be said of us! The Word of God does not operate according to our reason, logic, or understanding of nature. It operates in power according to the love, mercy, and truth of God. When God says, *“Let there be,”* there is. When God says to the dead, *“Arise,”* they do, and when God says that we are righteous on account of our faith in Jesus and His work of salvation, it’s true. Our response can only be, *“Yes, Lord, not only if You say so; but because You say so.”* In Jesus’ name. Amen.

<sup>4</sup> Paul quotes Psalm 32:1

<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 17

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for Your marvellous grace to sinful people. You dwell in a light that no one can approach, but You have now shown Yourself to us in Your Son Jesus Christ. Through Him we approach You confidently as Your dear children. You are the Creator and Ruler of this vast universe, yet You are concerned for the happiness and good of each one of us. Accept our humble worship and praise, and grant that we may continue in our gracious fellowship with You through Jesus Christ.

We thank You, Father, that You have chosen us not to suffer Your anger, but to receive Your forgiveness, and to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for us. Move us to hear and obey Your Son through whom You have spoken to us. Move us to follow the example that Jesus has given us. Open our hearts, that Jesus may continue to live in them. Grant that we may cling to Jesus as the only way through which people may come into Your glorious presence. Move us, both by the way in which You shape our lives, and through Your promises in the Gospel, to make our own commitment to You, in love, praise, and adoration.

Grant that we may walk in obedience to Your commandments, test all things by Your Word, cling to what is good, and have nothing to do with any kind of evil. Make us holy by Your Spirit to live the life of holiness, to which Christ has called us, and keep us free of all fault until His coming.

Father, since You desire all people to be saved and to come to know the truth, give us opportunities to proclaim Your Gospel to the ends of the earth. Inspire us to work, pray, and give for the salvation of people who as yet do not know You.

Grant that all in authority in our country may respect Your holy will. Protect from harm those who are in danger. Give peace and harmony to the nations on earth.

Make our homes harmonious places where the Holy Spirit is present with His power and wisdom. Give spiritual insight to all mothers. Grant all fathers godly leadership. Give all children an obedient spirit.

Have mercy on all who have gathered here today. Support the weak; correct the disobedient. Comfort us whenever we are troubled in body, mind, or spirit. We ask these things, and everything else we need, in the name of Your Son Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom for us all. Amen.

## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 12:1-9

<sup>1</sup> The LORD had told Abram: "Leave your land, your relatives and your father's family and go to the land that I shall show you! <sup>2</sup> I shall make you into a great nation. I shall bless you. I shall make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I shall bless those who bless you and shall curse him who curses you and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Abram left, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. <sup>5</sup> Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot and all the possessions that they had accumulated, as well as the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan, <sup>6</sup> Abram travelled through the land to the place at Shechem, to the large tree of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land. <sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I shall give this land to your offspring."

Therefore, he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup> He moved on from there to the hill-country east of Bethel and put up his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the

LORD and called on the name of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> Then Abram broke camp and continued to move on toward the Negev.

Romans 4:1-8, 13-17

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, what shall we say that Abraham, the ancestor of our race, has found? <sup>2</sup> For, if Abraham was justified by works, he had something about which to boast. However, he could not boast before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>4</sup> When a person works, his wages are not credited as grace but as a debt. <sup>5</sup> However, to the person who, instead of working, believes in God, who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. <sup>6</sup> In the same way, David also speaks about the blessedness of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered! <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will certainly not credit his sin!" ...

<sup>13</sup> It was not through the Law that Abraham or his descendants received the promise that he would be the heir of the world but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For, if those who belong to the Law are the heirs, then faith has been made worthless, and the promise has

been made ineffective. <sup>15</sup> For the Law works God's anger, and where there is no Law there is no transgression either.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the promise belongs to faith, that it may be according to grace, that the promise may be sure to all Abraham's descendants, not only to those who belong to the Law but also to those who belong to the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup> as the Scriptures have said, "I have made you the father of many nations." He is our father in the presence of God, in whom he believed, the God who makes the dead live and calls what does not exist into existence.

#### John 3:1-17

<sup>1</sup> There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher. For no one can do these miraculous signs, which You are doing, unless God is with him."

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus asked Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone

is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> What has been born of the sinful human nature is sinful human nature, but what has been born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I have told you, 'You people must be born from above!' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear the sound of it but do not know where it is coming from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who has been born of the Spirit."

<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus answered Him, "How can these things be?"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel without knowing these things? <sup>11</sup> Truly, truly, I tell you, We speak what We know and testify to what We have seen, and you people do not accept Our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you people earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has gone up into heaven except the One who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> As Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God has not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world may be saved through Him.