

February 20, 2005
2nd Sunday in Lent
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
Pastor Ott

God Guarantees It!

Guarantees. You see all kinds of commercials that guaranty this or that, don't you? Do you rush out immediately and buy whatever they are selling you just because they say they are guaranteeing their work? Or guaranteeing their product? Or guaranteeing what they are offering to you? Or do you really think that with that guarantee there is going to be some stuff that you are going to have to get out that magnifying glass to read all that fine print to see exactly what your part of the guaranty is? That if you don't do such and such at a certain time, the guaranty is going to be null and void. Like an extended warranty on a new car, you have to make all the maintenance requirements set by the manufacturer of the vehicle or the guaranty becomes null and void.

Guarantees. We like them a lot in our life. We would like to be able to offer more guarantees in our life, wouldn't we? Those of you that are here this morning and holding a small child and hoping they will soon go to sleep and quit squirming, would you like to guaranty to that little child that they are not going to face problems as they grow up in life? You here that are on the other end of life's spectrum, would you like the guaranty that things are going to go well and your mind will stay clear until the day the Lord calls you home? We would like to guaranty things, but we don't have the ability to offer certain guarantees either, do we? I would love to guaranty that this sermon is going to make sense to every one of you here this morning, but I can't guaranty that. There are just too many things in life that we can't guaranty no matter how much we want to. We don't have the ability. Or things that are guaranteed to us come with so much fine print that it ends up being nothing at all. It ends up being too much things that we have to do and without even realizing we didn't do it and so now the guaranty is gone.

Well, this morning we are going to talk about a guaranty that has neither of those problems. God guarantees it as it says to us this morning in Romans 4. And God doesn't add the fine print that here is my guaranty, you are forgiven, but in the fine print you read you have to do xyz or abc and then I will forgive you. God's guaranty doesn't have fine print. And also, God has the ability, he who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were, he has the ability to carry out the guaranty he makes to you and I this morning. That guaranty is that he credits to you and I a new standing. It is credited to us through faith in Jesus. And then secondly he guarantees to you and I that we are members of a new family through faith in Jesus.

All discussion at the beginning of the book of Romans is about what makes us right with God--how we become righteous or right with God. How are we justified before God? We are taught in Romans that we are justified. God declares us not guilty. It is not something that we do. As Paul was making this case to these Romans that he had never met, he calls out the example of Abraham who many of the Jews would site as an example of how he worked, how he did what God said, so therefore God considered

him a righteous man because of everything he did. You look at some of the things that he did and it is easy to see how they fell into that way of thinking. You know, what we read in Genesis 12 this morning. How would you like at age 75 to have God come and tell you to get up and pack everything you have and start walking and I will tell you where you are going as you are on the way? I don't think we would be saying, "Yes, Lord, that sounds like fun. Book me an extra trip." Yet, that is what Abraham did. So you can see why the Israelites would be inclined to say, "Yes, Abraham did this and he had the covenant of circumcision, and he did these things so that God made him his very own and the father of many nations." But the case is made clearly by Paul that that is not the case. Because even in Genesis it says that "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*" Not that it was an obligation as he says in our text. It wasn't something that he had earned or that he had deserved, but he believed what God had said to him and the power to believe actually came in the Words that God was speaking, not in Abraham himself. So it was credited, it was credited as a gift, not credited like your paycheck is credited to you because you worked these hours. Or credited to if you are on vacation because this was the agreement that was made ahead of time and this is what you deserve or what you have coming to you. God credits this new standing to us before God as a gift.

We have learned that from youth, but the problem is too often we want to have things credited to us because of what we do because of the law. Did the thought come to you this morning as you are sitting inside a church knowing more and more snow is coming down and the roads are going to be getting worse and the day doesn't look nice and yet you made the time to come here to church, so now obviously God must love you more than those that stayed home, right? Did you ever have that thought creep into your head? God must love me more because of what I am doing for him. Whether it's getting here to church, whether it's serving on a board, whether it's being a Called Worker or a teacher in a Sunday school or VBS? Look at all I'm doing, God must love me for what I do. I think at times we all have those thoughts go into our heads. He must love me more than those other people. If we want to think that way, then we have to go on the basis of the law. And God says if we don't keep the entire law, every last period and comma, every last exclamation point, then we are guilty of breaking all of it. And the very fact that you and I have this sinful pride in us that wants to say, "Boy God, you are lucky to have someone like me that is out on a day like this to sing your praises", even that in itself becomes the sin of sinful pride.

If we want to keep the law and if we want God to reward us because we have done something for him, then we have to keep it all. Then it becomes a matter of obligation. And when those scales are weighed my friends, you and I are going to come up short. Even I am going to come up short when I am getting weighed to something like that because it isn't physical weight, it's what you do, God says. And that is not going to work. We are going to be lacking. We are going to be far short. What does Paul say to us this morning? "*...law brings wrath.*" So if you want God to love you because you have done this or that or if you think in your mind "He must love me more because I have done something", then really you are saying to God "Judge me on the basis of the law all the time". None of us wants to say that because we will be found wanting.

That is why you and I can rejoice this morning that it is credited to us as righteousness. You and I are never going to be righteous by what we do. But we are righteous in the eyes of God because of what Jesus did.

Wednesdays we are reading Matthew to see his (Jesus') suffering and death to take away our sins—his perfect life we review throughout the entire year. But we see that he did the things that you and I can't do. He loved perfectly. He did everything perfectly. Sinful pride never crept into him like it does into us. He was perfect in our place and he died to take away our sins. And now the Holy Spirit gives us faith so that it is credited to us as righteousness. And now we have this new standing before God. We don't have to hang our heads and have our shoulders slouch because of our sins and because we can't stand before a Holy God. We can stand tall before God because we are forgiven. We are perfect in his eyes even though we have sinned. We are perfect in his eyes because of what he credited to us. That's God's guaranty. There is no fine print. There is not even an "all you have to do is believe", because you and I can't believe. It is the gift of God. It is by grace you are saved through faith and that is a gift of God. Not by works. Not even my decision to believe is my work. God guarantees it all—every last little bit of it. So when we have sinned, and we will sin, when we do things that we think are horrible, and we will do things that others would think are horrible, and in the middle of the night when we are honest with ourselves we will admit are horrible, you and I can have a confidence and a guaranty that is iron clad. God took away my sins in Christ. He sees me now as perfect through faith. It's not even my repentance that brings about this forgiveness. Christ had already won it. His law leads me to say, "Lord, have mercy" and his gospel shows me he already has had mercy. I AM GOD'S CHILD. I AM FORGIVEN. And now when the devil starts to work on me and say you can't be loved by God or you can't serve God because you have done all these things, we can go back to this guaranty and see that we stand right with God because of Jesus Christ. No ifs, ands or buts about it. WE ARE FORGIVEN.

Well, if that were it, that's pretty cool. That would be enough for one day, wouldn't it? But our Lord comes to us with something extra--something more. He tells us that we are part of a new family—not just his family, which we are through his gift of faith. We are God's children. But he also tells us we are children of Abraham. That might not sound like a big deal to us, but remember, Abraham was the one that God spoke to and said "all nations on earth will be blessed through him—through his offspring." And that "he would be the father of many nations." Not just the blood father of many nations, but as we hear in our text this morning, he is the father of all those who believe. This should comfort us because God had this special relationship with Abraham. And Abraham was by no means perfect. Abraham wants to keep Pharaoh from killing Abraham and he said to him "that's not my wife, that's my sister. Take her and sleep with her. That will be great." Abraham is no saint by his own actions. He was a saint by faith. But God had this special relationship with him. And now as we are told that we are children of Abraham, all that special relationship that he had with his people, that is now ours. He has this intimate love for us, this intimate concern for us. He is there day by day watching over us just as he did the Israelites. He is there to chasten us, to lead us back to him when we start drifting away. And he does that through the people that are around you this morning. He puts us together as a family of God, all as members of Abraham's household, so that we can encourage one another. So that we can lead

each other back when we have strayed. So that we can assure each other that we are forgiven when the devil wants us to doubt that. He gives us the purpose as children of Abraham to share the gospel with others so that others might know that they don't have to live in sin. They don't have to live in guilt. They don't have to live in fear. But they can live in peace, forgiveness and the confidence of heaven because they too can have the gift of the faith of Abraham as we have because Jesus died for them also.

The comfort and the confidence this gives us in our daily life is incredible. This isn't something that's just out there and that's a nice thing, now I'm going to go about my daily life and it doesn't matter. I don't care what you face during this week. Something difficult at work, something difficult in your relationship, something difficult driving home on a snowy road—you're God loves you and he is with you because he has brought you into his family and into Abraham's family. His love for you is intense and unending and unrelenting. His love for you is made known as you love one another.

This is God's guaranty to you. You are in a different family. You are no longer the black sheep at the family reunion sticking off at the side because no one will talk to you because of what you have done. You are a welcomed part of the family—a loved part of the family. And a part of the family that Jesus Christ died for.