



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
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February 24, 2010
Midweek Lenten Worship
Romans 3:21-26
Pastor Randy Ott

Justified By Grace Alone Through Faith Alone

We can get pretty obsessed with fairness, can't we? If something happens that we don't think is fair, we can get our undies in a bunch pretty quick and get pretty bucky about it, can't we? If a kid comes home and tells you that they didn't get to go outside for recess or they lost some other privilege because someone else in the class was screwing around or disobeying and the whole class was punished, you'd probably get a little irritated, wouldn't you? I'm sure the kids would. But we can think that's not fair and we are going to let them have it. Some of us at times pride ourselves on how freely we speak when we think something has happened that is wrong.

Fairness – consider the Passion History of Jesus, the history of his suffering and death. They brought witnesses that were paid to lie and bring false charges against Jesus and they couldn't even agree with each other. Even at the mock trial before the high priest, they couldn't come up with anything to charge him of anything worthy of death until they flat out asked him, "Are you the promised Messiah? Are you the Son of God?" And he truthfully said, "Yes." Then they decided they had to kill him. They incited a mob to kill him because they were accusing him of blaspheming when in reality he was telling the truth.

Fairness – the only one who really nails fairness on the head is the guy that sentenced him to death, isn't it? "I find no basis of any charge against this man;" instead of putting a period on it he went on "but, I'm going to punish him anyhow and then hopefully they will release him." They still wouldn't, so then he sent him off to be killed anyhow.

A speaker of fairness, a speaker of truth would be the thief on the cross, right? Remember when he let the other thief on the cross have it? They both started out mocking Jesus saying if he was the Son of God, he should do this or do that. They were no doubt throwing all kinds of insults and accusations at him. But later on in the day, the one guy had to say to the other, "Shut up. We are suffering justly for our sins because we are guilty, but this man has done nothing wrong. This is an innocent man that is dying here in the middle. Haven't you figured that out by now?" Here is someone that recognizes what was fair and what wasn't. His death was fair. Jesus' death was unfair.

Maybe it frustrates us, maybe it irritates us that those people could be that wicked so that they could do those kinds of things to my Lord and my Savior. This evening as we

come together, we stop maybe shaking our heads about the unfairness of what those people did and maybe again consider the unfairness of what we have done to our Savior. Then maybe we rejoice in the unfairness of our God. Another word for the unfairness of our God would be grace. By unfairness I am saved.

Unfairness – you could put that in that hymn we just sang, couldn't you? It's not fair what happened to Jesus. The reason it's not fair is what Paul laid out completely in the first couple chapters of Romans before what I just read to you. He laid out quite clearly that it didn't matter if you were Jew or you were Gentile. Everyone stood under God's condemnation for sin just as equally. The Gentiles might have been able to make the claim "We never had God's Law. How could we possibly be convicted of this?" But he made the case pretty clearly that God's existence and his demands have been clearly seen from what he made and from the conscience that's inside of us, so you should know that there is some God. It's only a fool that would deny that there is a God. He said men are without excuse. His divine nature and his eternal power have been clearly seen from what has been made from the time it was made. So they are guilty is his conclusion.

Those who have the Law are obviously guilty because God has laid it out pretty clearly. He chiseled the stone, do this, don't do that. It's pretty clear to see. And even when mankind comes along and says, "I've never committed adultery," then God comes along and says "If you look at anyone with lust in your heart you've committed adultery." "I've never killed anyone." "If you hated your brother, you're a murderer." He lays it out so crystal clearly to see just how filthy and rotten we are as sinners. We can still get bucky about that.

We want to turn fairness upside down sometimes, don't we? "I know the wages of sin is death, but God must love me a little more than he loves that person because I've tried harder. I've done more. I'm here. I'm worshipping him. He must love me more than the people that stayed home and put their backsides on a couch and their feet up and watched some people from Southeast Asia jump around on some ice. God must love me more than he loves them."

Think about it. What does God say? He says, "Love me with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind." Even while we are here at worship at times we can't do that, right? Even when we are gathered together for the sole purpose of saying, "God, you're amazing. You're incredible. I love you completely." Satan still crawls between our ears and gets our minds to wander, doesn't he? Any of you get to thinking that the time for self examination this evening was just way too long? "Hurry up already. Come on. There are Olympics on tonight. Why are we just standing here doing nothing?"

We are a little more comfortable when that guy stands on the pulpit and he points out the sins of that person over there. That I can listen to; "Let him have it, pastor. But that quiet time when I'm supposed to be looking at the filthy rotten wretchedness of my own thoughts, words and actions? Let's get a move on." That's how we are, isn't it?

We don't love God with all our hearts and all our souls and all our minds. We don't have the righteousness that God demands of us because he doesn't tell us to be a little bit holier than the guy on death row. He says, "Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy." That's the kind of righteousness he demands for the gates to heaven to be opened up for us. That kind of righteousness you and I can never have.

So it is incredibly unfair when God comes and says, "But now a righteousness from God has been made known." A righteousness that is apart from Law; it's apart from your efforts, it's apart from my efforts, it's apart from what we do. It's entirely from God. And it says what the Law and the prophets testify. God had to make it known because you and I wouldn't know about it, but he started making it known a long, long time ago. Did you catch it in the Psalm we read this evening? This Psalm talks about our sinfulness. Did you catch it where it said, "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" There's fairness; we couldn't stand before God. That's fair. That's genuine. That's direct. That's the absolute God's honest truth.

But did you notice the grace? "But with you, there is forgiveness. Therefore you are feared." This grace, this righteousness that God would just give to us, this forgiveness he would give to us had been talked about a long, long time ago. But now he makes it known that this is how he is going to carry it out. It's through faith in Jesus Christ. It says that everyone is a sinner. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That's fair. We all fall short. We don't come close. We are all filthy rotten wretches.

But here's the unfairness. We are justified. That means we are declared not guilty. He just said to us that we are as guilty as sin, but I've declared you not guilty. Why? Freely, apart from Law, by his grace, undeserved love, through the redemption, through the act of buying back that came because Jesus was perfect in our place. He gives us the righteousness that our Heavenly Father demands. He was absolutely perfect in our place. His mind didn't wander. He didn't want to look at someone else's sins. He wanted to carry our sins. And he carried them, fully and completely to the cross. He stood there silently. Can you imagine that? The Youth Group sang that in the Hymn, *The Lamb*. I think it was verse 3, about being still. Here he is. He carries our sins, and he's still. He doesn't say anything.

Think of how bucky you and I get when we feel we've been wronged, we've been cheated, and that things aren't fair. How we'll raise our voice and we'll say some choice words we wouldn't want to say normally. Here is the one who was completely and absolutely innocent but because he is carrying our sins to the cross, he's still. He's quiet. He doesn't raise his voice. He doesn't protest. He doesn't scream his innocence even though the people could see his innocence. This is grace.

He presents himself as the sacrifice of atonement. He's perfect in our place. He dies in our place. Now through faith in his blood, you and I are considered holy in God's eyes. That is the epitome of unfairness.

That's why we rejoice to know our God as well as we do; that's why we rejoice to know what grace is. It's not something we do. It's the love of God that has led him to do everything, every last thing to take away our sins. That's why we focus on Christ crucified, because in that cross we see clearly the grace of our Savior. We see that it's not our efforts. It's not what we do in response to his grace that leads him to save us, even though we are going to want to respond to his grace and live for him. But we do it to thank him that he loved us first.

Unfairness – that's our God, through and through. If it were any other way, you and I wouldn't be saved.