



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 20, 2011

2nd Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: [Romans 4:1-5,13-17](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 12:1-8](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 121](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 4:1-5,13-17](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 4:5-26](#)

God Gives Life to the Dead

You've made it to church on a very special morning. It's going to be very beneficial for your life going forward. It will be very beneficial for your life going backward. As you look back in the past, it will settle some old arguments for you this morning. I guarantee that. In [Romans 4:17](#), God settles the age old argument that you probably had with your siblings and that your children have with each other now. You know how the argument goes...are not...are...are not...are...back and forth and back and forth, right? Did you ever do that?

God answers it for you. He says, "God calls things that are not," that's you, "as though they are." So the next time you get in that argument, the answer is "are not." That's what God just told us.

God calls the things that are not as though they are. God makes the dead alive. You don't like to think that he's talking about you, but he is. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins which separated you from God," he says in [Ephesians 2](#). You were dead. God makes the dead alive. You're walking around. You're breathing. You're kicking. You're yelling. You're fighting with your siblings. Yet, you "are not." You are dead. You're spiritually dead.

Here we see that God makes the dead alive. It's counterintuitive in how he does it. We'd like to think we have some role, something we have to do, some role that we play in this. He lays it out before us quite clearly. What did Abraham discover? He goes back to their ancestor to show them what he discovered. What he discovered is that it's not by the Law.

What did Abraham discover in regard to being made alive, or being justified, declared not guilty of the sin that clings to us from birth on, the sin that we're born with that condemns us to hell? We talked about that last week. It's out of your control, the sin that you're born with. During Lent, we focus on our sins. We focus on repentance. We saw last week that before we've done anything, we are sinners, and that sin itself damns us to hell. We saw that it's out of our control what God has done to save us. That truth is repeated today.

God sent Jesus into the world and what he did, he did for all people and he offers to all people. But he doesn't offer it by the works of the Law. If he did, then it wouldn't be a gift. It would be an obligation. He says when a person works, their work is not credited

to them as righteousness. You'd all be a little put out if you got your paycheck and your boss said, "Here's a gift I have for you. I'm just giving it to you out of the goodness of my heart. I'm not giving it to you because you worked for it. I'm just giving it to you." That would kind of irritate you, wouldn't it? Maybe it would irritate you and you'd have to protest your boss somehow in some way, shape or form.

God tells us that's not how it works before God. We don't do things before God. We don't earn his love. We don't earn his forgiveness. We don't carry out the works of the Law so that God will then love us. That's what Abraham learned. He said, "Go to the Scriptures. What did Abraham learn? It's not by Law. It's a gift." A gift doesn't come by the Law because that would be an obligation.

That makes sense, doesn't it? If we are spiritually dead when we are born into this world, dead things can't make themselves alive. Dead things can't do anything. Things that are not cannot make themselves so that they are. It's a truth that we as Lutheran Christians treasure. We're saved by grace alone, not by works.

Yet, how often do you and I forget this truth? How often do you and I get more focused on what we can do for our comfort than about what God has done for us? What I mean is this...I don't know how many times in my ministry when I'm leading a Bible class and I ask a question, you're troubled, you're uncertain, you're struggling with things, what should you do? You're struggling with guilt. You're struggling with uncertainty about what the future may bring. You're struggling with all these things. What should you do? Almost unfailingly the answer I get is pray.

That sounds good and noble, doesn't it? Pray, talk to God about it, right? But is that where we are looking for our comfort and our strength and our help in what we do? Prayer is us talking to God. If you want to have God talk to you, if you want God to come to you with his gifts and his grace and his blessings, wouldn't we be going to reflect on "I'm a baptized child of God. I'm clothed in Christ's righteousness. I don't care what the future brings." God has said, "You are my own. I bought you at a price. I've named you. You're mine. I clothed you with Jesus' perfection. I'm not going to let you out of my hand." Wouldn't that bring us more comfort than what we do in our prayer life? I'm not saying prayer is bad or that you shouldn't pray. But if that's the first thing we go to and if that's the only thing we're going to, we're going to our works. Our works aren't going to comfort us because our works are always going to fall short. Satan is going to crawl into your ear and whisper to you, "You haven't prayed hard enough. You haven't prayed often enough. You haven't prayed faithfully enough. You haven't prayed enough for this person or that person." Satan is always going to be pointing out where we have failed because we are always going to fail.

So pray, but do it in a conversation with God. Read God's promises that he says to you of "I'll be with you always to the very ends of the age." Or "Be still and know that I am God." Then pray "Lord, it's hard for me to be still right now because I'm really worried." Make it a conversation. Read that section of Scripture that comforts you, and then pray about it. Let your prayers flow out of what God has done for you. Then your prayers

will be more like God has taught us to pray...praying according to his will. Then it's not so much that we are focused on what we are doing but out of what God has done for us already. We praise him and we turn to him and we find our strength in him. I think that's God's plan for us. Otherwise, we're relying on our works and what we do. I don't want to do that. Like we said this week, I know what's in me and you know what's in you.

Our God points us to what he did and who he is. He says this is even how it was with Abraham. Abraham was 500 years before the Law was given. Abraham was not declared righteous by keeping the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law wasn't given yet. What did Abraham learn in this regard? The Jews would say, "Yes, but he kept the covenant of circumcision, so he did his part." Or those that want to point to what we do today would say that, but that's not what Scripture says.

Notice how Paul leads you by the hand, grabs you and drags you kicking and screaming and says, "What does Scripture say? Take a look. Just look at it. Read it to me. Look at it." Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, not Abraham was circumcised and God credited it to him as righteousness, not Abraham did this and then God declared him righteous, but Abraham believed God and it was counted as a gift to him. It was credited to him as righteousness.

Then Paul takes us again and says we should have known this, that God said to Abraham, "I'll make you the father of many nations," not only those who are of the Law and that covenant relationship, but those who are of faith, who have the faith of Abraham. He's the father of us all. Faith is credited as righteousness.

This is where it's hard for you and me. God doesn't tell us to "go and do and then I'll love you." God says "I love you. Now live in response to me and serve me in these things. But when you're uncertain or when you're struggling, don't look at yourself. Look at me." We all are pretty self-absorbed in one way, shape or form at one time or another. We think we are God's gift to whatever it may be. God says, "Don't think of yourself as God's gift, think of me." Think of Jesus as God's gift to you and his perfect life in your place, his death in your place that takes away all your sins, and his promise to never leave you nor forsake you. Focus on that and God gives you the gift of righteousness. Then in response to that, sure we live for him, sure we want to serve him, sure we pray, sure we encourage one another, but those are never our comfort. Our comfort always is that God has made the things that are not as though they are. God has made dead, you and me, alive in Christ.

So don't look to your doing. Look to what has been done by Jesus.