



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

June 26, 2011

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: [Romans 3:21-25, 27, 28](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 11:18-21, 26-28](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 78](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 3:21-25, 27, 28](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 7:15-29](#)

### **The Christian Faith, One Word at a Time: *Atonement***

This morning we heard in the Gospel about how the crowds were amazed at how Jesus taught because he taught as one who had authority, not like what they were used to. Do you ever hear words like that and wish you could have been there and heard it and seen it and understood and known what was going on? Do you ever wish you could have seen Moses' glowing face when he came down off the mountain or heard him tell them what God had been saying to him for all that time? Maybe you wish you might have been able to hear the great missionary, the apostle Paul, as he came into a town and talked with them the first time. What did he talk about? What would he have said?

It's probably easy to daydream about that because then you look up and all you have is this guy with strange-looking new facial hair that has a white stripe down the middle of it. So you think you're kind of stuck. You've really missed out.

The reality is that over the next 16 weeks we get a chance to sit at the feet of the apostle Paul. When he wrote to the Romans, he hadn't been to them yet. So the first part of the book is kind of like Paul's Bible information class, the chief things he wanted to drive home with people when he first came to them. Over the next 16 weeks, we are going to look at these readings from Romans and listen to Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, speak to us what is essential to our faith really. We are going to do it using one word at a time. Each week we'll take these readings and we'll look at one of the words and then focus on what it means for us and how it shapes who and what we are as Christians, just like it shaped the Romans, who and what they were as Christians.

That's kind of a cool thing the Lord gives us this opportunity to do. You can read through the parts we're not reading in the Second Lesson. You can dig into the Book of Romans this whole summer. What a wonderful opportunity our God is giving us, so seize it.

But today, as we look at the Christian faith one word at a time, we are going to focus on the word that comes towards the end of what I just read to you. That word is *atonement*. It's a word that takes us back to the Old Testament in essence.

Did you notice, when Paul starts talking about this righteousness that comes from God, he talks about the Law and the prophets already talked about this. They testified to this. If you were paying close attention to the Word of God in the Old Testament, you

should have known that righteousness wasn't going to come from you. That's what he had spent the first couple of chapters and the first portion of Chapter 3 just driving home, that God demands righteousness, most certainly. Here's the problem... you and I, we aren't righteous. There's no one righteous. In fact, in the verse right before what I started reading to you he says, "Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the Law, rather through the Law we become conscious of sin." We see what filthy rotten sinners we are. It's not just words we say at the beginning of the service and in confession. It's what we are.

In our core, we have this sinful nature that on this side of heaven is never completely gone. So we do what we are. We don't want to hurt each other, but we end up doing it. We don't want to do some of the things that God tells us not to do, yet we still end up doing them. Then God tells us "You have to be righteous." We hear that and now we are getting kind of scared, if we are honest with ourselves. That's why this instruction for Paul about *atonement* and this righteousness that comes from God is so important to you and me. Make sure we never get screwed up on it and make sure we never start boasting in anything else except God.

I said earlier *atonement* was an Old Testament word. The Law and the prophets testify to it. It really takes us back to the mercy seat. Remember the mercy seat? It's not the back pew. That's not the mercy seat that he's talking about. The mercy seat was what was on the Ark of the Covenant. The angels that spread their wings over it were talked about as where God caused his name to dwell. It was in the holy of holies in the temple and no one went in there. Only once a year did one guy go in there. The High Priest went in there once a year on Yom Kipper, the Day of Atonement.

Do you remember what he went in there and did? That day they would get the two scapegoats. It would drive home this point that your sins separate you from God. To drive home that point, they ritually put all their sins on these goats and then one of the goats was slaughtered. They drained the blood and took the blood and sprinkled it on the mercy seat, the *atonement* cover. That should have driven home the point that righteousness doesn't come from us. It has to come from blood being shed, because we are just what we are. We are filthy rotten sinners.

Then to drive home how complete and absolute God's forgiveness is, even though we should be the ones separated from God, they put the sins on the other scapegoat and sent it off into the wilderness to say "God has removed your sins from you through blood. Now you can stand before God."

That truth is what Paul is pointing them to when he writes these letters. Our righteousness comes from God, not from how we keep the Law. That's never going to work because even if I can find someone that I keep the Law better than, I'm not keeping the Law the way God said, because he said "be perfect." Don't tell my wife, but I'm not perfect. Neither are you.

So we should be separated from God for all eternity, yet God acted to make us righteous when we couldn't be. He not only pictured it through all this blood through all those centuries in the Old Testament, he finally sent his own Son, and through faith in his blood, through faith in the blood of Jesus, who lived perfectly in our place, who took all of our sins to the cross and shed his blood so that we might be forgiven, he now does the unthinkable. He considers us righteous. He drives it home again, "Don't think this is about you. There's no difference. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's all of us. But look at what he says, we're justified freely.

One thing you notice in this section, God kind of knows what thickheaded people we are. He drives home this truth again and again. We're justified. We are declared not guilty. It comes from outside of us. It's not that we are made able to keep the Law. That could never be. But we are declared as though we have kept the Law because Jesus kept it in our place.

We are justified freely. It's not from us. By grace... again, it's not from us. It's his undeserved love. We didn't earn it. We didn't deserve it. It comes through Christ buying us back, paying the ransom price of living perfectly in our place and dying in our place. Now because of this, Jesus is presented as that ultimately sacrifice of *atonement*. His blood takes away all sins of all times and we can stand before God knowing that we are fully and completely forgiven. We can stand before God no matter what we have done, no matter who we are and who we have hurt or who we have failed to help. Our God looks at us and doesn't see that anymore. Through faith in Jesus, he sees Jesus' perfection.

That's *atonement*. We are now "at one" with God. We should have been sent away from God, but God has made us "at one" with him. We can stand before him and not have to bow our heads. We can look him in the face. We don't have to bow our heads like kids that got caught with their hand in the cookie jar. We are sinful. We are guilty. But he says, "No you're not. I've made you holy."

How incredible is this?! How amazing is this that God gives us what he demands?! That's the nature of our God.

Think about it... no matter how you've screwed up, no matter what you've done, no matter what guilt you're struggling with right now, no matter what guilt you're trying to self-medicate with chemicals, you don't have to do that. Jesus is telling you that he has taken away all your guilt, not just some of it and that you better shape up and get rid of the rest. He has taken away all of it. When you come to receive his body and blood today, he gives you this tangible evidence. "This is how much I loved you."

So now if we want to boast, if we want to talk about how great something is, that leaves us with just one option, right? Our God and how great our God is. We can't really boast in ourselves, can we? Do we?

Are any of you struggling right now with something along the lines of “God, why would you let this into my life?” Are you struggling with relationships that are breaking up or chronic pain or illness or loss of a loved one, struggling with issues that you can’t seem to get to where you want them to be? Do you ever get to the point where you say, “God, I love you. I try to go to church all the time. I read my Bible. I’m doing all this Lord. Why would you let this into my life?” Have you ever gotten to that point?

At that point, in that moment, if you continue down that path of “why God,” isn’t it a form of boasting? Isn’t it in a certain way saying “God, I’ve done more for you. I deserve better from you.” Isn’t that really in that part of our heart where that’s coming from? As though somehow God owes us something because we’ve served him in the church or we’ve served him faithfully. We haven’t done what others have and they don’t seem to struggle like we do. They ran around on their husband or their wife and they were always at the bar and drunk and this and that, and I didn’t do that. Yet I’m struggling and they don’t seem to be.

When we have these things and we don’t know why God allows them into our lives, if we go down that path of “why, Lord,” we’re really acting as though we deserve better, and that’s not a good path to go down. That’s when, if we are going to boast or we’re going to say anything that we know to be rock solid truth, it has to be this truth... my God loves me so much he stretched out his arms on a cross and died for me. My God loves me so much he gave me the gift of faith through the work of the Holy Spirit. My God loves me so much he’s put me with other Christians so they can help me and encourage me. The evidence of God’s love for me is all around me. Sometimes we just have to trust. I know it’s not easy. I know that sometimes it’s the most difficult thing in the world to do, but just trust that whatever God allows into our lives, he’s going to help us through. It will end up for our eternal good. I can’t tell you how. I’m not God. But God knows.

The God who loved you this much is not going to abandon you just because sometimes you want to boast in yourself and say “You owe me more, God.” His love for you will stay rock solid and certain. His love for you will hopefully provide you with someone to remind you that God’s love is certain. Its evidence is in Christ. And God promises to be with you always, to the very end of the age. He will help us. He just might not do it in our time and in our way. He does it in his way. His way is always best. If you want any proof of it, just look at a cross you have around your neck or on the wall in your house, and think about just how much he loves you. He was your sacrifice of *atonement*, and he isn’t going to leave you now.