



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

July 3, 2011

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: [Romans 4:18-25](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Hosea 5:15-6:6](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 119c](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 4:18-25](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 9:9-13](#)

The Christian Fath, One Word at a Time: *Righteousness*

The theme of worship this morning... the holy ministry is entrusted to people out of God's mercy, not because of who they are. We have Matthew the tax collector being called. We have Paul, someone the Holy Spirit used to write the words I just read to you, the one who had persecuted the church when his name was Saul. It's obvious that those who get calls to ministry are not called because they are so good. They are murderers. They are thieves. They are liars. I can't say that I've always spoken the truth. Like all of you, I've lied at one time or another. That being said, I want to assure you that what I'm about to tell you is absolutely the truth, because you might be inclined to doubt me.

My second son, Timothy, has a girlfriend. His girlfriend is a very good golfer. So I invited her to come here. I told her there is a nice golf course just down the road. I said, "Come and golf. When you come and golf, I'll crush you." She's got a scholarship to go play golf in college someplace, so there's no way in the world I'd crush her, but I like to talk like that. So I said, "I'll crush you, and by crush you, I mean I'll lose graciously." She still hasn't come. It's as likely that I could beat her as me beating Usain Bolt in a 100 yard dash. It just isn't going to happen. It's just unreasonable. It's not only unlikely, it's unreasonable. To have any hope or confidence that would happen would be absolutely ridiculous.

I suppose that's about like believing that Abraham and Sarah were going to have a son when they were about 100. That's the very nature of what our God is talking about today when he talks to us about faith, faith that leads to righteousness, a righteousness that we all need. Faith at times is unreasonable. The fact that God declares us righteous by faith is unreasonable. Yet, that's the cornerstone of who we are and what we believe as Christians.

Our God gives to us an unreasonable righteousness because what is reasonable to us would be completely at odds with what God says makes us righteous. That's the point that Paul was trying to drive home to the people in Rome that he had never met. He told them that God's wrath was being revealed on Jew and Gentile alike because there was no one righteous, not even one. They had no righteousness, no perfection. They were all sinners. As sinners, they deserved the wages of sin, which is death. They deserved to go to hell. But as we saw last week, God revealed a righteousness that's apart from Law, that's by faith. Some might claim that's unreasonable. The Jews among them might say, "No, God always pointed us to the Law. It's unreasonable to

say 'look at faith'." So he takes them back to the one they called the Father of the Jews, Abraham, and shows them that Abraham had it credited to him as righteousness because he believed the unreasonable.

When Abraham was 75, God came to him and said, "Look at all the stars in the sky. That's how your offspring is going to be." Abraham said, "That's nice, God, but I haven't had the first one yet and I'm 75 and Sarah is about as old as I am and she hasn't had any kids yet either, so what are you talking about?" Then he went on and told him about how all nations on earth would be blessed through the offspring that he would have with Sarah.

Now it's almost 25 years later and God came and repeated those same promises. God tells him this and Sarah laughs, if you remember, because she just couldn't believe it. It was too unreasonable. She laughed at this promise of God. But we are told Abraham, against all hope, against it, it wasn't reasonable, in hope he believed because he trusted that God had the power to do what he promised. And lo and behold, Isaac was born when he was 100. God kept his promise and all nations on earth are blessed through the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, through Jesus. It was unreasonable. It made no sense.

In the same way, it is unreasonable, it makes no sense to think that we are going to be saved and be declared righteous by faith alone... faith that Jesus lived in our place and that Jesus died in our place with all of our sins. That is unreasonable to us because we are so inclined to think it has to be something we do. We have to do good. We have to be good. We have to be better than someone else. "If I'm better than so and so, then God will love me and let me into heaven." Paul's making the point... don't go down that path. He says "This is why it was credited to him as righteousness" is not just for Abraham. It's for us also. God credits righteousness to us who have believed in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

It's unreasonable righteousness that we have. It's not logical. It's not something human reason can deduce or ascertain by its own abilities. It comes by the gift of faith that God gives, this trust that God has done everything, that Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life so that we would be absolutely certain we have been declared not guilty. This is the righteousness that stands before God, the righteousness that comes from outside of us, an alien righteousness, a righteousness that comes through Jesus' life and Jesus' death and the Spirit's gift of faith. That's the only way you and I are going to be righteous or holy or perfect before God. We aren't going to do it on our own. Paul has laid that out clearly in Romans already in the first few chapters. Nothing that we can do or offer to God is going to make us righteous. It has to come from outside of us. It has to come from God. This is what we glory in as Christians, this unreasonable righteousness, hope against hope, we believe what God has said.

I'm here to tell you not everyone does. Did you ever ask people when they say they believe in God what they actually mean? Or do you just want to assume they mean the

same thing you do so that they'll be in heaven with you? Do you ever ask them, "When you say you believe in God, what do you mean?" Because really, the devil believes there's a God and he is why hell was created, right? So just saying I believe in God isn't the answer. It's what you believe about God.

I find that when I ask that question of people who I run into contact with that quite often, I'd say 7-8 times out of 10 the answer I get is, "I believe God will let me into his heaven because I've tried to be good and do good. I've always tried to treat people the way I want to be treated. I've always tried to do what's right. I'm not perfect, but I think God will let me in because he knows how hard I've tried." Ask people and find out what they mean, because if they mean that, they are trying to get in by their own righteousness, right? Trying to get into heaven by your own righteousness leads to the express elevator to hell. Those people that believe that are not going to be in heaven with you. Those people that believe that are going to be in hell.

I hear all the time from our members that they don't know anyone that doesn't believe in Jesus. Really? Start asking. There are a lot of people that are trying to get to heaven by their own righteousness, by their own doing good and being good. It isn't going to work. I'll tell you, you aren't going to be laying awake in heaven at night thinking, "Gee, I wonder where Joe Blow is that I used to hang out with? He told me he believed in God. I wonder why he isn't here?" You aren't going to be in heaven mourning over loved ones that aren't there with you. So maybe the time to lay awake at night and say, "Lord, how can you use me" would be now.

God has revealed this righteousness to us so that the we can be ministers of reconciliation. He's entrusted that to us. He hasn't just called the full-time called Gospel workers into his ministry to share this message of reconciliation. He's given that task to every single believer. If you know the righteousness that God gives is the same one that he demands, and you know how it comes, and you know that this is the only answer to heaven, why waste time talking about the weather? There are people that you love. Talk to them about the Savior and the only righteousness that avails before God. That's no lie.