

July 14, 2019 Faith Is Like The Canadian Shield Romans 4:18-25

It happens every morning. I find myself in the washroom, preparing to shave. And yes, for those who do not know it, having a beard does not mean one escapes this daily male ceremony. I have to shave my upper cheek (left and right). I have to shave my upper lip (at least an eighth of an inch of it). And I have to shave my throat. I can't ever remember cutting or nicking my throat. My cheek from time to time bleeds. And here is a confession: if I cut my lip it can take an hour to get it to stop seeping, even with the use of a styptic pencil.

What does shaving have to do with being a follower of Jesus, or explaining the meaning of some of Romans 4:18-25? Precisely this. Every morning as I shave I find myself before the mirror. And the question is what do I see, as I look at the reflection of my own face? When you wash your face and hands in the morning what do you see, when you look up and see your image in the mirror? Ladies, what do you see as you apply your make-up, a touch of lipstick, where you cannot ignore the fine details of the face that peers back at you from the mirror?

If you are like me you are tempted to say glibly, I see a lot of wrinkles. My late mother-in-law, Verna Irvine came to live with us in Pickering after her husband passed away. We managed to get her on the patient list for our family doctor. We made an appointment and the result was she had a whole

list of tests that had to be done over the next 6 months. We made her an appointment with an eye doctor to get new glasses. As a result she wound up having cataract surgery. I remember the morning she said to me, “You know I am not so sure this medical stuff is a good idea. I looked in the mirror this morning, and this old woman was staring back at me.”

The Christian faith can be boiled down to a handful of doctrinal statements. They are like the granite of the Canadian shield. They are not about to change. They have been celebrated and remembered for 20 centuries and followers of Jesus regardless of denominational tags still remember them and count them off as basic things. They are constants in a world of shifting sand. 1. We are lost in sin. Lost. 2. The good news is we have been chosen by God for Salvation. In the play Hamlet, William Shakespeare tells us several things about the principle character. Hamlet has just returned from Wittenburg, that hotbed of Reformation Biblical teaching. Hamlet says, “There is a divinity that shapes our ends.” God has chosen us. 3. As a result of sin and God’s choosing us, we have made a choice to believe in Jesus. We are saved through faith in HIM who died on Calvary’s cross. This morning we continue the series and look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the series within the series, exploring the affect that Jesus has had on us and on our lives. Hence the question, what do you see when you look at the image seen in a mirror?

Part of what Romans 4:18-25 teaches us is that we should see the face of someone who is righteous. Right with God! Someone who does the right things in the sight of God and according to HIS view of you. If you are like me you almost choke at the idea that you are righteous. You can quickly, all too quickly, list off your imperfections, your sins, your secrets. Well first of all, they are not secrets where God is concerned. HE Knows. HE knows all about you and me. In fact HE knows us so well HE knows things about us we have not yet discovered or realized. HE knows us better than we know ourselves. HE says you and I are righteous. You do need to remember this: it is true you are righteous in God's sight. That does not mean you are perfect, never make a mistake, never stumble, never backslide, never sin. What it does mean is that your believing in Jesus causes God to see you differently than you see yourself.

Paul the apostle was a former Pharisee. Among other things that really means he knew the Old Testament. He was a Bible scholar. What he tells us in Romans 4:18-25 is one of the best kept secrets of the Old Testament. Abraham who is still looked upon as the father of the Jews, was a righteous man in a sinful world. God chose him. God called him. Abraham did something we tend to think is easy, which is actually quite difficult. Abraham believed God. It was the direct result of his faith says Paul that Abraham was righteous in God's sight. He responded to God's call. He left home taking his family and his goods and he followed God when he literally did not know

where he would be going or wind up, or even how he would manage to get there. Abraham believed. He believed the God who gives life to the dead. That is another way of saying God saves those who are lost in their sins so that they may live.

That teaching about believing God and entering into eternal life is as old as the book of Genesis. And the Genesis definition of that relationship is actually quoted by Paul in the passage we have read in Romans 4. Abraham believed God and it was “credited to him as righteousness.” Further, Paul goes on to write, that the words “credited to him for righteousness were not written for Abraham alone “but also for us. For us who believe in HIM who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” Jesus in whom we believe was crucified. HE was dead. And HE was buried. And the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, Sunday, early in the morning HE was raised to life. The principle mark of how deeply that affected the earliest believers is that within a week’s time of the resurrection of Jesus, all of them being Jews, they began gathering to worship (first of all in that famous upper room) not on the age old Sabbath which was Saturday but on the day of resurrection, Sunday, the first day of the week as every calendar in print reminds us.

And this is what they and we believe. “(Jesus) was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification.” These things have marked us. We believe what God has revealed in the Scriptures. We gather (not solely) but for the most part to worship on Sunday, remembering

every time we do, that it is the day of resurrection which has become the Christian Sabbath, and that decision was not made by European believers, or Greek believers, or other Gentiles, it was made by people who had lived their lives as Jews. Peter, James and John, the 12 plus the 120, plus the 3,000 who believed at Pentecost when the wind blew, and flames appeared above the heads of the disciples, and the Holy Spirit made HIS presence undeniably manifest.

What does all of this mean? First. From the beginning, from Creation, God has asked one thing of the human race. What HE wants of us is that we believe HIM. When we believe God, HE forgives our sin and sees us, literally sees us, as righteous...sin washed away. We are clean in HIS sight. Well meaning people built a religious system that emphasized more than anything else the power of good works. Keeping the law is about doing good deeds, living the life of the righteous. Except no one has ever been able to do it consistently. Life style. Culture. So God gave us and the whole world, Jesus.

So, second. Jesus came into the world born of Mary to call us to believe. HE coined the phrase, "For God so loved the world that HE gave HIS only begotten Son that whosoever believes in HIM should not perish but have eternal life." If you believe in HIM, you have it. God will credit you as a believer with righteousness.

What does that mean? Well, regardless of how many wrinkles or scars you see when you look into the mirror, you should remember, God sees you differently than you do. He sees you as one who is righteous. Not because of what you have done, but because of what Jesus has done...HIS death which deals with your sin and mine, His resurrection, which gives us eternal life. You and me, who were lost...have been found. We who were dead in our trespasses and sins are alive, and we are on our way home. To God, not to us, not to the church, to God be the glory.

Let us pray;

This morning the prayer consists of words taken from HYMN 682. You will recognize the words because you know them well. Let us pray:

Precious Lord: Just as we are, without one plea, but that your blood was shed for us, and that YOU bid us, come to thee, O Lamb of Gold we come. We come.

Just as we are, thy love unknown, has broken every barrier down. Now to be thine, yea thine alone, O lamb of God, we come. We come. Amen