

May 30, 2021 Justified By Faith Romans 3:21-31

Dearly Beloved;

As Bob Dylan wrote and sang, "The times they are a changing." It is clear that sometime in the next month or so Ontario, and Canada intend to try to begin the long journey back to what we refer to as normalcy. It will not (I predict) happen quickly. And there will probably be some interesting problems along the way. For example, a week ago I had an appointment to receive my second dose of the Pfizer vaccine on July 14th. At this point I am invited in a couple of weeks to apply for an appointment sooner than the given date. We shall see. Lots of details to be worked out. For the Church the question is when can we get back to worshipping in our church sanctuaries? The answer offered at this point is that we can gather, ten at a time out of doors. The Session and I will be working on the problems faced by all of the churches. I will update you as soon as I can. I am not in a hurry. And I pray you will be patient with me. Choices will be made and decisions will be shared. My policy from the beginning was to keep you safe. That is what a shepherd does. He guards the flocks from the wolf, the bear, and the lion, and the pandemic of Covid-19 and its variants. Stay tuned. Please be patient with me and those with whom the responsibility of deciding this question rests. God bless you.

There is a matter on which I would like some assistance. On Tuesday, the 25th of June, I officiated at the grave side for the burial of a lady named Betty Faulkner. She was active in St. Andrew's Stirling decades ago. She sang in the

choir. Her gray haired son, (I met both Doug and Dave), one of them sang in the Jr. Choir. I was one of the ten allowed by Covid-19 rules to be at the graveside for what was a burial service...no hugging, no hand shaking, and an observance of only the most basic things. If anyone remembers her involvement, I would like to learn more about her. God bless you. Let us turn to God's word.

As I mentioned last week, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Gospel writers, are all different and their accounts reflect what they were most impressed by, when it came to spending three years under the leadership and teaching and modelling for ministry, with Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us Jesus was definitely human. They also tell us that the circle of disciples at least, were also convinced HE is the Christ, the Messiah. And based on the experience of HIS death on the Friday, and HIS rising on the Sunday morning, that HE is indeed the Son of God and the Saviour our humanity needs so very much. The issue is our sin. It is undeniable. We profess our faith in God, but we also behave as if that were not nearly so important an issue as moral codes and commandments.

John was writing another kind of document while at the same time telling us much the same story about Jesus as did Matthew, Mark and Luke. John starts his Gospel account by telling us that Jesus came from God. In the beginning, he tells us, Jesus was with God in creation's blossoming hour, and more to the point, that Jesus was God. His story does not lead to that

conclusion, but rather begins with that declaration. The details of his account make the point that there was only one thing the disciples found it easy to believe in the end: Jesus is God's Son, our Saviour, the Saviour of the whole wide world and all who live within it.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying John's account is better than the other three. They all lead us to the conclusion that Jesus is God's Son and our redeemer. They, each one of them, tells us that what Jesus required of people HE met and ministered to, was that they believe HIM, and in HIM. In a Jewish, Old Testament world view, that means HE is as the creed would eventually put it, "very God of very God."

There is a 5th voice that needs to be recognized in this matter of defining who Jesus is, and what HIS relationship to the world is all about. That 5th voice is the voice of the apostle Paul. This morning I read to you from the letter he wrote to the Christians in Rome, in a time of terrible persecution. Christians were being hunted down and literally fed to the lions in the Roman Coliseum, as a matter of public entertainment of the pagan Roman Empire. Paul was one of those Jewish Pharisees who volunteered to help find and destroy the followers of Jesus. His life changed on the Damascus Road when he met the one he would serve with the balance of his life, as Christ the Lord.

Here is what is different about Paul. He is a theologian. He was in the formal sense a Bible scholar. Read

that as Old Testament Scripture scholar. Unlike Matthew, who was a tax collector for the Romans, Mark, who was the nephew of Peter, who was a fisherman, Luke who was a medical doctor when medicine by our understanding was still in the dark ages, (although he knew enough to self-isolate from people who were sick, and from whom others caught the sickness just by socializing with them), and John was also a fisherman fundamentally unlearned, compared to Saul of Tarsus who became the, apostle Paul.

Paul is used to making defining points on how to live, based on Scriptural texts which he believed were indeed, the words of God. He does not tell us stories of Jesus, he interprets stories of Jesus in order to live faithfully in very trying times. What does he tell us?

Vs. 21 There is a way to be righteous, right with God, that does not involve obeying the commandments...and yet the Law and the Prophets testify to it.

Vs. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus...to all who believe.

Vs. 23 All have sinned. All of us, all of them, everyone.

Vs. 24 We are justified by God's grace, through the redemption of Christ. It is free. It is a gift.

Vs. 25 Because God is in charge, Jesus was a sacrifice of atonement, we believe in the power of
HIS shed blood.

Vs. 26 God demonstrates HIS love in an act of justice. He justifies or saves, those who believe in

Jesus.

Vs. 27 We have no room to boast of our goodness, or our faith, boasting is irrelevant.

Vs. 28 Paul says we maintain that a person is saved by faith, apart from the keeping of

Commandments. (Keeping the Old Testament Law.)

Vs. 29 God is the God of one and of all. Everyone...you and me.

Vs. 30 There is but one God. What He requires is faith.

Vs. 31 And the Law remains significant for one reason...it is about living by faith.

In chapter 4 which I did not read at the beginning of this message, Paul quotes from Psalm 32:1-2. I will end with this quotation. It makes the point that Paul knew the Scriptures well, could quote them with ease, and he finds them consistently pointing him in his daily wrestling with the issues of life, toward Jesus who is the Christ, the Saviour of one and of all. "Blessed are they whose transgressions (sins) are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin, the Lord will never count against him." (Psalm 32) Amen