

Second Mid-Week Lent  
March 8, 2017  
Romans 3:21-26  
Justified by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone  
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Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

There are so many moving Lenten hymns it is impossible to sing all of them yearly. One we are not singing this year is “O Dearest Jesus” by Johann Herrmann. It is #117 in CW. As we draw one week closer to the events of Jesus final days, the hymn writer’s questions are worthy of our consideration. “O dearest Jesus, what law have you broken That such sharp sentence should on you be spoken? Of what great crime have you to make confession? What dark transgression?”  
s.1

We won’t discover the answers from lips of the high priest, or the Sanhedrin, that’s for sure. There was no evidence before them that indicated a broken law, or a great crime, or some dark transgression. Still they pressed on with the charges of blasphemy and took Jesus to Pontius Pilate. Pilate had no proof of any wrongdoing. He tried to let Jesus go. Finally, the Roman governor gave in to the crowd’s demands and sentenced to a horrible death a man he knew was innocent.

Think about it. What law had Jesus broken? What great crime did Jesus need to confess? What dark transgression had Jesus committed? Only yours and mine. Jesus was without sin. Jesus is the one exception to Paul’s statement, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

God the Father laid on his Son, Jesus Christ the huge mounting pile of God’s laws we break. The Father made Jesus guilty of our crimes against him and against humanity we must confess. Our dark transgressions of God’s holy will brought about the sharp sentence of pain and death the holy Judge pronounced on the Son of Man.

This is our redemption from sin and death and hell. Paul goes on, “and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.”

In Dante’s Inferno, the sign over the gates to hell read, “Abandon hope, all you who enter here.” We can apply his words also to trying to use God’s legal system, the law, as the means to be righteous before God. Dante’s words describe the horror of total despair. There is the horror of total despair under the law. “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law. Clearly no one is justified before God by the law,” [3:10] the apostle wrote to the Galatians.

The same apostle wrote here that there is a righteousness apart from the law. This is the justifying righteousness the Bible makes known in the Old Testament and the New. “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

The Holy Spirit moves our eyes and hearts to look up from our place in the valley of despair and hopelessness under the law toward the hill that is shaped liked a skull; Golgotha in Aramaic, Calvary in Latin. See there God’s holy Son hanging in your stead on the cross. As the law screams out, “sin, guilt, death, and damnation” Jesus’ cross is even louder “forgiveness, justification, life, and eternal salvation in heaven.”

The righteousness of God that justifies us, declares us not guilty of our sins, is Jesus’ perfect obedience of the law he offered on the cross. This is true also for those sinners who lived before

Jesus came and died on the cross. For centuries prior to Jesus' coming, Moses and the prophets proclaimed the righteousness of God in that coming Savior. When Jesus came, he bore the punishment for their sins also. This is God's justice in action as Paul wrote. "He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Christ."

God demonstrated his justice upon Christ for sinners of all time. Sinners who lived before Christ and we who live after Jesus' death and resurrection all are justified through faith in Christ. There is no difference in our sin. There is no difference in our justification.

Hermann wrote in his hymn, "Whence come these sorrows, whence this mortal anguish? It is my sins for which you, Lord, must languish; Yes, all the wrath, the woe that you inherit. This I do merit." s. 3

What are your sins, your crimes, and your transgression that brought Christ's mortal anguish? Idolatry, murder, adultery, false witness, covetousness? You and I merit God's wrath and woe Jesus inherited. Yet through faith in Christ we have a righteousness apart from the law. This righteousness justifies us by grace alone. Its benefits are ours through faith alone.

Sin is always joined at the hip to death. They never come separately. Not even in Jesus' case. Jesus died because he had made our sins his own, our guilt his own, our death and damnation his own. All this is so we have his righteousness as our own. This is the message, wondrous to speak, that moves despairing hearts to trusting in Jesus hearts.

God has declared the entire world righteous in Christ by the power of the cross. In confidence and thankfulness, we kneel at the foot of Jesus' cross to look up and marvel at the Father's divine love in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Even though we do not sing with Johann Hermann this year, we share his certain hope on account of that divine love visible in that moving sight:

"And when, dear Lord, before your throne in heaven  
To me the crown of joy at last is given,  
Where sweetest hymns your saints forever raise you,  
I too shall praise you." CW #117 s. 7

Amen. <SDG>