

**Sermon    June 19, 2022    Second Sunday after Pentecost**

<sup>9</sup> *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written:*

*“None is righteous, no, not one;*

<sup>11</sup> *no one understands;*

*no one seeks for God.*

<sup>12</sup> *All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;*

*no one does good,*

*not even one.”*

<sup>13</sup> *“Their throat is an open grave;*

*they use their tongues to deceive.”*

*“The venom of asps is under their lips.”*

<sup>14</sup> *“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”*

<sup>15</sup> *“Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

<sup>16</sup> *in their paths are ruin and misery,*

<sup>17</sup> *and the way of peace they have not known.”*

<sup>18</sup> *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

<sup>19</sup> *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

<sup>21</sup> *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.      Romans 3:9-26*

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Is it me or are the streets in our area becoming especially bad? I can't remember so many potholes or having to slow down so often to pass over rough areas. There's a part of me that wants to fault the road department with an especially poor job. But then again there is a lot of road construction going on, so maybe they are otherwise occupied or waiting to do more permanent fixes in some of those bad spots. I'm not sure, but it sure is easy to pass judgment!

You get judged every day. If you are employed, you get judged by your employer. If you are a student, you get judged by your teachers. If you are a teacher, you get judged by the head of your department and the principal, not to mention the students! If you are a neighbor, you get judged by the condition of your yard, the behavior of your children and your dogs. During the bad days of Covid-19 you would get deathly stares if you did not wear a mask even when the all-clear had sounded and masks became optional in many places. The culture judges you, too. Why do you have so many children? Don't you care about the polar bears? They're dying, you know! And what about that gas-guzzler you drive? Or, you need to have more children! Don't you know that you're letting down Western civilization which needs 2.7 children per family to maintain the population? No matter what you do, there is always someone there to sit in judgment over you. There is always a critic, an evaluator. Someone is always measuring you — your performance, your intelligence, your work ethic, your strength, your worthiness, your appearance. Sometimes it seems that there is no end to the pressure to do good, to do better, to be best. And the basis for all of this is some kind of "ideal," some kind of "law" that judges you; measures your performance — a "law" that tells you whether you are good or bad. And that can be comforting. Being measured gives you a chance to show how good you are — how you are

improving. It is easy to begin to trust your performance, and what the “law” says about you ... what the critics say.

But what happens when the critic is also God? What happens when the evaluator is also the Divine Creator? Can you trust your performance, your ability, your worthiness when it is before Him that your character is being critiqued ... that your goodness is being judged? If you think you can manage that and come out OK, you will be disappointed. It is a false trust, a false faith, and it will always fail to deliver. When God’s Law speaks, the message is clear: No human being gets things right. All “fall short of the glory of God,” (Rom. 3:23) and “through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). That’s what the Law does. It does other things, to be sure, but that is its primary task— it is always accusing you of your sin. It is always measuring you. It is always making you conscious of your disobedience. God is your critic, your evaluator, and your judge — and His Law is the measure by which He judges. And you just don’t pass that test. You fail. No extra credit, No additional push-ups. No apple-polishing. No second chance. You fail. You are left with the critic’s wrath — eternal unrighteousness. Separation from your Creator. That’s the pronouncement.

But there is an answer to the Divine critic ... something has changed. Paul says, but now, without Law —a Righteousness of God has been manifested ... in Christ Jesus! (Rom. 3:21–24). That is the answer to the pronouncement of the Law condemning you. The only way your status can be changed is if the judge, the critic creates a new status, for you, only received as gift by faith, not earned as a prize — His righteousness given; not yours merited — but His given freely to you. And God’s Word of righteousness silences the condemnation of the Law. His Word is full acquittal. Paul makes sure that you know that all of this is done: in Christ Jesus. He is the one who joins you in your sin sickness — He is the One who assumes your death. The righteousness of God, is, after all, only, “in Christ.” The eternal judge does not simply declare the world righteous ... He declares the world righteous

IN CHRIST ... He therefore declares you righteous IN CHRIST! Only God's righteousness can make someone righteous — can change their status. And that is what He does. He bestows righteousness. It is pure grace, gratuitous favor ... it is against all of mankind's deserving. But it is what He does. The blood of Jesus Christ, your LORD cleanses you from all sin! The accusing Law of God is silenced in the death of God's Son in human flesh upon the cross for you! There is now a rightness... that is "apart from the Law" (Rom. 3:21) which has been brought to light. God makes right what is wrong with you — and it is only the death of Jesus that does it! In Christ, God exchanges your defiant, disobedient un-rightness for Christ's divine obedience and right-ness. Faith is trusting what God now declares about you! Trusting Christ equals receiving His right-ness — it becomes yours: His gift given and received.

The world may judge, evaluate and measure you — but there is One now who does not — for He has found you good, right and holy in Christ Jesus. All this is yours as you come to the table and receive all that Jesus Christ has done for you with his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reign in glory! Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him. Amen.

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