

Sermon #1,201: Romans 4:19-5:2

4-17-16, 4th Sunday of Easter "Jubilate," Bethany-Princeton MN

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION PROVES THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS

Prayer: Christ Jesus, Your empty tomb declares that the Father accepts Your death on the cross as payment for all the sin of the world: We ask You to comfort us with the forgiveness of our sins, and fulfill in us with power the work of faith. Dispel all doubts in Your grace and work in us the will to die to sin in repentance and walk with You, serving you in a sincere faith and a godly life. Risen Lord, hear our prayer! Give us Your life! Amen.

The Text, Romans 4:19-5:2. ¹⁹ And not being weak in faith, [Abraham] did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹ and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²² And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." ²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴ but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. ^{5:1} Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ:

Where does forgiveness come from? Maybe that is a strange question. Probably you haven't thought to ask this. You might think, *Forgiveness just is. Forgiveness is just there.* But what if I told you that there was a time when it was very possible that there would be no forgiveness of sins, there would never be forgiveness of sins, for anybody? That all the Old Testament believers' hopes of the forgiveness of their sins would have been all in vain? That it was possible that you would live your whole life unforgiven?

That sounds awful, doesn't it? And so unreal to us. *There's always forgiveness,* we think. Well, it's true it was this dramatic, that the very forgiveness of each person's sins hung in the balance. It was when Christ lay dead in the tomb.

Jesus had the sins of the world laid upon Him. ***“He bore our sins in His own body on the tree,”*** it says in 1 Peter. Our sins were nailed with Jesus to the cross. Then He took our sins with Him to be buried in His tomb, as Romans 6 says: ***“we were buried with Him.”*** If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then – it says in 1 Corinthians 15 – ***“we are still in our sins.”*** If Jesus did not rise, it would be saying that God the Father did not accept His death as payment for the sins of the world. There would be no forgiveness!

So everything really did hang in the balance for us. 'Cause you don't get into heaven if you have sins. There are no sins in heaven, no sinners in heaven, only saints. For you to get into heaven, to have eternal life and salvation, your sins must be taken away. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead you would still be in your sins – having no forgiveness, no heaven, no salvation.

So what good news it is that we hear today from Romans 4. It says that God ***“raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”***

Although Jesus rose from the dead by His own power, here the Bible also says God raised Him. The reason why it is said this way is because of what we are talking about today. God was judging if Jesus' death paid for all sins. So when Jesus rises from the dead it is with God the Father's approval. It is the sign that God the Father accepted Jesus' payment for sins. ***“He was raised because of our justification”*** says that in Jesus' resurrection God was justifying the world – declaring every sinner just, that is, righteous and completely innocent – for Jesus' sake. Justification is forgiveness. The risen Jesus is God pronouncing every sinner forgiven for Jesus' sake.

You see this connection in the Easter history. As soon as His apostles see Jesus, His first word is ***“Peace” (Jn 20:19)***, His first act is to bestow upon them the ***“peace with God”*** that we hear about in Romans 5:1. His next words – ***“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”*** – center upon the power to forgive sins and also to withhold this forgiveness from unrepenting sinners. Only when Jesus is risen does He send them out with the forgiveness of sins. The power for the sins to really be forgiven, comes from His resurrection.

So Jesus' resurrection proves that all our sins are forgiven. It proves that Jesus has completely satisfied the demands of the Law; He has made full satisfaction for all our sins. This is where forgiveness comes from. It comes from Jesus' resurrection – the completion of His work as Savior.

This means it's really true. As true as Jesus' resurrection is, that's how true the forgiveness of your sins is. This is called "objective justification," meaning your justification – your forgiveness – is based on an objective act, something unchanging. You can't change that Jesus is risen. It happened. God declared the world forgiven for Jesus' sake. Regardless whether you believe, Jesus rose from death. For His sake God forgives everyone's sins.

This seems so easy! Everyone is forgiven! Wouldn't everyone love this? Wouldn't everyone appreciate it and never take it for granted? Wouldn't everyone be confident about their forgiveness? No, that just isn't the reality, is it? This brings us to "subjective justification," the subjective or personal part: whether a person believes this.

In these verses from Romans, Paul uses Abraham as the example, that he believed so "**it was imputed to him for righteousness,**" this righteousness was "imputed" or credited to him, by faith. Then he says, "**It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.**" By faith whatever Jesus did is credited to you, it counts as though you did it. So you are forgiven for Jesus' sake, but you only get the benefit of this by faith. Unbelief, and unrepentance too, means you are judged on your own merits. Jesus' resurrection – and what it gives you, the forgiveness of sins – only blesses you by faith.

Why would anyone reject forgiveness? Everyone needs forgiveness, and God forgives fully and freely! But there are two things that get in the way of this beautiful picture; they both have to do with how we see our sins.

The first is that people think their sins don't matter very much. If God forgives all the sins, then the sins can't be all that bad, can they? What kind of motivation are you giving people to live a godly life, if they know all the sins are forgiven? And surprisingly you do hear many Christians talk this way, or act this way. You'll hear Christians say, "Well, everyone is a sinner," or "All sins are the same," or "Nobody's perfect anyway," or "Don't sweat it, God forgives everything," as a way of excusing the sins they do.

The problem with this is that if this is the attitude then the sins are unforgiven. It isn't that Christ didn't pay for them. The problem is in how Christ's work is being received. If you think you can love your sin and still love your Savior, you are mistaken. The mark of a Christian is not someone who is so successful at saying no to sin; the mark of a Christian is that you hate the sins that you do, and that you struggle against the sins.

This verse from Romans 4 says that Jesus “**was delivered up for our offenses.**” It calls our sins “offenses,” things that are offensive to God. When a person thinks lightly of his sins, he will not think much of Christ’s forgiveness. This is why our Lutheran Confessions say that when there is willful sin – that a person continues in the sin willfully, wanting to go on doing it or at least comfortable with it – then faith in Christ cannot co-exist with it. This attitude toward sin pushes out faith in Christ. This is someone who is not listening to the Good Shepherd. This is why the Law is preached in all its sternness, and why the church preaches seriously about sin and warns you to take it seriously. Not because we love to go negative. But so you flee from sin, hate your sin, and run to Christ! – who has won the victory over all sin.

So Jesus’ resurrection also (as we said) “gives me strength to forsake sin and live a new life.” Christ was raised for our justification, not only to free us from the curse of sin but also to deliver us from the rule of sin – so sin would not rule and run your life but so you will exercise the strength that His resurrection victory gives to you and works in you. You are not just fated to be a careless sinner. His resurrection gives you His strength to forsake sin and live a careful, yet joy-filled, Christian life.

Besides thinking too lightly of our sins, the other thing that blocks and gets in the way of the right appreciation of the forgiveness of sins is when people allow their sins to matter *more* than the saving work of Christ.

This is when a Christian doubts his/her forgiveness. This is such dirty work by the devil. First he gets a person to think the sin’s not so bad, but then when the effects of the sin take root and can be seen, how it causes such wreckage, the devil plays this sin over in the person’s mind in a continuous video loop. It produces guilt and shame. It produces doubt that you can really be forgiven. At the least you think nothing can ever be the same. You think you have ruined everything and it can’t be made right again. It causes a person to feel estranged from God and from the Christian community. They stay away from church because there is holiness there and all they feel is unclean. Although they know the words of forgiveness by heart, they don’t believe that these words can apply for them or be true for them.

There’s also a problem here for people who are victimized by sins of others, people who have been sinned against. What problem do they have, if they didn’t do the sin? Well, they can focus so much on what’s been done that they can’t see Christ clearly. They see sin more than they see Jesus. The

sinful actions make their lives unclean too, if nothing else that they are filled with anger and hurt. They can make the sins that were committed against them to be greater than Christ and His justifying work.

So when the sins take on more importance than Christ, what you need is to hear the message of objective justification: that as true as Jesus' resurrection is, that's how true God's forgiveness of your sin is. This means that the sins you have committed are all forgiven. This also means that if you have been sinned against, all that has been defiled and infected in your life has been completely cleansed by Jesus. His resurrection declares it to be so.

You bring your doubts to the empty tomb. You bring your fears that you can't be forgiven to the empty tomb. You bring your hurts to the empty tomb. You bring your feelings of unworthiness, your failure to obey, your fears that things can't be made right again, to the empty tomb.

The risen Jesus declares that He has made it right with God. God declares that for Jesus' sake you have forgiveness of sins. It comes from God. Jesus earned it for you. God gives it to you. You receive it from Him in the means of grace. So you can say: **"We" – even I – "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."** He is risen indeed! Amen!