**Written Copy: You Can’t Find God-He Found You – Romans 3:21-24**

Mid-Week Lenten Service #5

Wednesday April 10th, 2019

**Text: Romans 3:21-24**

21 But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. 22 The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. 23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. 24 They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

**Exegetical Statement**

Paul continues an argument that even through the Jews were given and observed God’s Laws they are in no better position before Him than are the Gentiles which were not given Moses’ Laws and did not follow them. The Gentiles are condemned for failing to worship Him. The Jews are condemned even though they read the Laws they would not and could not keep them. Jew and Gentile are alike in that none truly seek God or seek to obey Him but instead do the works of evil that pours out from their heart, a heart that believes it is right before God because of their actions and without reverent fear doesn’t examine itself to see the sin he is actually doing. For all men the Law does not make you right with God but instead shows you your sin, how un-right (unrighteous) you are-how far away you have fallen. But what the righteousness of God is has been revealed and is attested to in God’s Word as it reveals Jesus Christ to be the atoning sacrifice by which God’s righteous wrath over the sins of man has been appeased through the shedding of His blood. That forgiveness and declaration of righteousness comes not from man earning it but as a free gift by faith-also a gift from Christ. The sacrificial system was God’s method of restraining that wrath in past times as the shedding of animal blood pointed toward the righteousness given by faith in the present time through the final atoning sacrifice that is Christ. Therefore no man can boast that he has attained righteousness with God through his own works, not the Gentile who might claim no sin by not living under the law, nor the Jew who might claim obedience that earns righteousness. No one can be right with God on his own. All men are made to be righteous (in right standing) with God through faith in Christ.

**Focus Statement:**

Christ is the answer for all men being right enough to have a relationship with God. He was the only man to live a life that was always in right standing with God. He died the death we deserve because of our sin and the Father’s wrath over that sin was spent. The right standing Christ earned by obedience He gives to us as the free gift of faith. He sends that gift to us through Baptism. The Spirit comes to us and finds us in the Gospel. When we try to walk away He chases after us. We need not seek Him, He is always there

**Function Statement:**

**Why it’s important to know**:

All of the Christian rules to break have the common thread of: “Here is what you do”. They lead us to believe that through our actions: what we do or refrain from we can approach God and deserve to have a relationship with Him. Paul explains that no matter who you are you fall short of deserving to be God’s child and cannot earn the right. The more you try to do the further away you fall from Him. To say that you must do something in addition to what Christ has done throws dirt on His suffering and death.

**What the hearer should do as a result**:

Stop trying to find the secret to approaching God. He comes to you in Word and Sacrament. In our lives of Sanctification our part is to make use of the means by which He promises to come and bless us. To use the faith He gives us to hold fast to Him. And as our love response to glorify Him and share His love with one another through our obedience to His instructions on how to live life-knowing that as we fail His blood covers and forgives all our failures.

**Subject Sentence: God finds you and makes you His righteous child**

As we have reached the conclusion of our journey through the “7 Christian Rules That Every Christian Ought to Break as Often as Possible” our final rule to discuss tonight is actually a summation of all the previous rules. All of the previous 6 rules have a common thread that run through them. To illustrate this I’d like to share three vignettes, two of which are inspired by the book this sermons series is based on (“Broken: 7 ‘Christian’ Rules That Everyone Ought to Break as Often as Possible”). While these stories are not based on actual people they are illustrative of those both inside and outside of the church culture. See if you can discern the common thread.

The first is about a woman who we will call Doris. Doris was raised in a broken home and has the mental scars to prove it. When she hit adulthood they came back to haunt in a string of failed relationships where she tried to find happiness in all the wrong places. She tried to find it through alcohol, through drugs, through sexual promiscuity. Each only left her feeling more broken and more despondent. Then a friend gave her a copy of a book that explained the Power of Positive Thinking and how that can change your life. It taught techniques for meditation and how to reach out and find the power that permeates the entire universe and is the entity behind all world religions. Through meditation and other exercises a person can draw themselves closer and become filled with the force which is the source of peace in life. And Doris has found peace. Not perfect peace; but when strife, doubt, and pain come she turns to the techniques the book has taught her and the peace seems to return once again. She hasn’t quite reached the stage of total unity that the book promises, but she continues to work on it. And she shares this new found secret to life with others around her struggling too.

The second is about a fella named Jim. Jim grew up in the church, his parents taking him every Sunday. And he hated it. As soon as he was old enough, he stopped going. He was intelligent and did well in college. He landed a job in the automotive industry and worked his way up to mid-level management and was being eyed for a promotion. He married and had children. But lately the happiness that used to describe his home life seemed to be evading him. When he would get home instead a warm welcome the kids would be fighting and his wife would be complaining about something he hadn’t done or needed to do, or some problem with the kids at school. He dreaded going home at times. And then there was an attractive co-worker who seemed to find excuses to eat lunch with him. When they would sit and talk alarm bells would be going off in Jim’s head, but he was starting to ignore them. When he confided in one of his close friends of the struggle he was going through the friend suggested he come and visit his church. Jim told him: “The last thing I need is some guy who thinks he’s better than me judging me and calling me a sinner.” The friend replied “That’s not what my church is like at all. The pastor dresses just like us. And he doesn’t talk down to us about being sinners, he doesn’t really talk about sin at all. Instead he gives sound advice on better ways to live our life and share love with one another. He says that Jesus didn’t come to condemn us but to give us life to the full.” Jim went one Sunday and liked what he heard. He talked his wife into going and she liked it too. They both began to implement the suggestions that the pastor gave them, and life seemed to be getting better. Jim knew they still had room to grow but if they kept at it they could attain that life the pastor says Jesus had to offer them.

And finally there is Danielle. She used to call herself a “Jesus Freak”. She loved to attend the Praise and Worship” service at the progressive church down the road. Unlike her parent’s church they didn’t spend their time on reading and studying Scripture. They concentrated on the Praise Music through which she felt Jesus presence. It was song after song after song. There was a sermon, but it wasn’t really heavy, none of that doctrine stuff. It was all about how uplifted she felt when she sang and swayed to the music. She just knew in her heart that Jesus was here in a way He was not at her parent’s church. Everything was fine until it was time to go away to college. She was separated from her church, but she still had her Praise music on her phone. The problem came in her first semester biology class, The Professor began his lecture asking if any of them were Christian. She along with a few others raised their hands. He then asked if they really believed what their Bible said about the origin of life. This time hers was the only hand in the air. The professor and many in the rest of the class giggled or smirked. Throughout the remainder of the semester the Professor seemed to mount a dedicated attack on her belief in God as Creator and a six day creation. She held on at first, listening to her praise music and chanting along with the simple lyrics singing about love for Jesus. But in her heart doubt was growing. By the end of the semester she had realized what a simple fool she was to believe something so unscientific as a Creator God and His six-day creation. Science was the answer and had the answers. Not to all the questions, but new discoveries were being made all the time, and new theories to explain the remaining mysteries. Perhaps by the time she graduated those questions would all find answers.

What is the common thread among these stories? Each person was able to find their way to god as they had come to understand him, even if that meant he no longer existed. Let’s look back on the rules we’ve been encouraged to break and see if there is a common thread among them. Rule #1: You Can Find God in Your Heart and Through Your Emotions. Rule #2: That You Can Find God and Please Him Through Your Obedience. Rule #3: That You Can Find and Approach God Through Your Logic and Reasoning. Rule #4: That You Can Find God and Measure His Love for You Through Your Prosperity. Rule #5: That You Can Find God and Approach Him Through the Spirituality-finding the perfect worship setting. Rule #6: That You Can Find God Through Your Freedom from Obeying the Rules. So; what is Rule #7? The summation of all of the above: That **YOU** can find God. That through what you do, what you think, the discoveries you make, what you feel in your heart, what you hold in your hand, you can reach out and touch and grasp onto God through your own means. In your own way. God as you want Him and need Him to be. That you can find the gate that unlocks the door to heaven, especially heaven as you hope it will be; either up there or here on earth now.

God’s Word before us screams out God’s answer to all these false Christians rules: **YOU CANNOT FIND GOD**! God is perfect. He is righteous. He is without sin. Paul explains how we are unable to rise up against that barrier. **Romans 3:10-12** **“10 as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. 11 There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.”** No matter what you do or how hard you try you are a poor sinful human being. If you were able to find your way into the presence of God, you would be destroyed for sin cannot stand in God’s holy presence. Not just you but every single human being on this planet. There is no one good enough to come into the presence of God by his own means. Not even one. We are like a person stuck in a hole that is too deep for us to climb out of.

***[Show Video of Man Stuck in a Hole]***

Because we could never climb out on our own. God had to come down into our pit, into our sinful world and rescue us Himself. God the Son did that by coming down and taking on human flesh, becoming a man-God in human form. Only He could do what is necessary so that we could live in the Father’s presence. We could never draw near to God, so Jesus did the work of drawing us close to Him. He drew from us all our sins, all the ways we attempt to come near and earn favor with God, ways that actually do the opposite: push us father away. He earned for us the declaration of righteousness-being in right standing with God through His words and actions here on earth. He obeyed God’s commands, not just in His words and actions, but from the heart. His obedience came from His love and desire to please His Father, and His love for us and the desire to be our perfect Sacrifice. He died to forgive all our sin. He took the punishment we deserved for our sin so that we would never have to. Because of what Christ has done we can be declared to be in right standing with God, not by our actions, but by everything Christ has done for us. And in His resurrection we know what our future holds: life lived with Jesus now and eternal life to come.

It’s His free gift that He gives to each and every one of us in our Baptism and through the Gospel message. The free gift that is faith. The free gift that comes from the Holy Spirit through the Gospel Message. A gift that works to renew us and refresh us every time you hear it. The gift that draws us back to Him every time we might stray, every time we think that we can please God and come to Him apart from the means He has provided for us in His Word and Sacrament. It is He that jumped down into the hole that is this sinful world. It is He that draws us out, every time we turn and fall in. He uses His word to show us the hole we are in, then draws us back out using the rope that is the Gospel Message that we cling to by the power of faith. And He uses that word to help keep us from falling back in by guarding our way: following the path that Jesus lays out for us as His precious Church living and working in a sinful world.

A good example of this is found in our Gospel Lesson. A Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner. While Jesus is there the Pharisee sits in judgment on His actions according to what he believes to be his superior knowledge of God’s Word and commands. A woman who is referred to as a “woman of the city”, which is another way of calling her a prostitute comes and kneels at Jesus feet. She is crying and using the tears and her hair to wash Jesus feet. The proud Pharisee exclaims how wrong this is. If Jesus is who He claims to be He would never let such a woman approach him. So Jesus uses a story to explain the situation. The Pharisee is like the man who believed himself to have a small debt. The woman is the person who confesses to a huge debt. She knows that because of this she has no right to approach Jesus. But she is there because she knows Him to be gracious and merciful. He actions speak of humble contrition and repentance. He faith in His mercy connects her to the reason Jesus had come, and He forgives her of all her sin. Her actions demonstrate the love that flows from such a heart forgiven; love for our Savior and love for one another. Forgiveness to be shared with one another.

Each one of us carries a debt of sin that weighs us down so greatly that we could never approach God on our own. And thankfully we don’t have to. Jesus came down and through His death and resurrection has opened the way to The Father. Through the gift of faith He freely gives we are declared to be good enough to stand in His presence, we are declared righteous-in right standing. Our sins constantly being forgiven and washed away. The Holy Spirit pointing them out to us and moving us to repent of them so we can understand more deeply the awesome gift that grace is. Christ gift of the Holy Spirit is what is working right now and every time we meet here through Word and Sacrament to draw you back to Him. May that work continue in your life and be your source of love and peace now until the day your stand in His presence in the resurrection. Amen.