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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 13, 2019
18th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 32:7-14, Luke 15:1-10
Hymns: 281; 324:1-6; 342; 50:2 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

¹²And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, ¹³although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. ¹⁶However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. ¹⁷Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: The fairness of God.

It's just not fair! That is a complaint that is heard from people from childhood through old age! It's not fair that some children get a cell phone and other parents say "NO! It's not fair that some teens have their own car, can stay out as late as they want, and other parents say "NO". It's not fair that some go out and buy new cars, and others are stuck with older models. It's not fair that some pay more taxes than others. It's not fair that some get sick, and struggle with infirmities for many years, while others seem to have a far easier time in life. Perhaps some feel that the best answer is that no one ever said that life was going to be fair!

But then people look at these issues in life, and decide that it is God who isn't fair! Now some of the examples I chose would seem rather childish to use against God. That's the point, isn't it? We are all rather childish in our estimation of how things ought to be or life just isn't fair! Isn't God fair?

Some of the Jews in captivity in Babylon accused the Lord of not being fair. They saw themselves as being punished for the sins of their fathers, and not for their own transgressions. They didn't feel that their transgressions deserved such harsh treatment from the Lord. We are told in Scripture that God is both just and fair. Indeed if there is a deficit in the fairness of God, if indeed we do not receive what is rightly coming to us, it is not in blessings that the Lord has held back, but in judgments for sin that the Lord has held back what we deserve. How this is possible when the Lord is righteous and holy, just and fair is found in the gospel of God's love and forgiveness! The Apostle Paul used himself as an example when he wrote of the grace of God and how it is that --

THEME: Christ Came to Save Sinners!

We all need to come to the conclusion that we are --

I. As Guilty as Guilty Can Be!

This is the conclusion that Paul had been brought to concerning himself. It was not how he had previously thought of himself. In fact it was quite the opposite of how he had previously evaluated his life and moral character. What brought about the difference was an eye opening experience when the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. Saul of Tarsus had been brought up in a devout Jewish home. He had studied the Torah and all the writings of the Talmud under the best teachers. He had joined himself to the sect of the Pharisees who adhered strictly to the law of God. Indeed they were so intent on adhering to the law of the Lord that they added definitions and guidelines to the ceremonial law to assure themselves they didn't even come close to accidentally violating the law. And so Paul came to the conclusion that he was topnotch among the Pharisees in keeping the ceremonial law and he was indeed a righteous man! In Saul's zeal for the Lord he went after the people that held to the teachings of this Jesus, who claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. He knew in his heart of hearts that the worship of Jesus as Lord and Christ was blasphemy, and so all adherents to the Way were worthy of death! He did his best to arrest, imprison, and testify against believers in Jesus, condemning as many as possible to death by stoning! Saul who we know as the Apostle Paul thought of himself as a righteous man. Indeed he was convinced that he was among the most righteous of all men!

And then he was confronted with his error. He was wrong. He was wrong about just about everything! That made all the deeds he had done vain at best, blasphemy and murder at worst! His image of his whole life was left in shambles! He was as guilty before God as guilty could ever be! The delusion of righteousness by the deeds of the law was destroyed. All that was left to Paul was the evidence of sin, and with sin came death and condemnation. What else dare one expect from a God who is just and fair?

Now it is easy for us to see and condemn the sins of others. We hear the hateful speech used in our society. We see the failings of others to respect the sanctity of life, to life with love towards one's neighbor, and we are ready to shake our heads at the pitiful moral condition of this world. What we are reluctant to do is to acknowledge and confess our own moral depravity. We can be and in so many ways are as blind to our sin as Paul was to his sin. We dismiss a great many of our sins as either being inconsequential because they are so small, or because society doesn't regard them as sinful; or because we see others do so many things that are so much more hurtful, that we close our eyes to the facts. We, each of us, are as guilty as guilty can be!

When we look into the mirror of God's law we will see our failure to love and trust in God above all things. We will confess to abusing his name, leaning on other things for guidance and deliverance. We have all been guilty of neglecting the Word of the Lord, of despising superiors, or hurting our neighbor in words or actions or failing to live pure lives, of taking advantage of others for our own gain, or gossip, or discontent. There you have it! You too have violated the Law of God from top to bottom! You too are as guilty as guilty can be! And so am I. And so am I!

Now recall the conclusion the Spirit leads Paul to record, that he, Paul is the chief among sinners. Paul actually reinforces that conclusion when he speaks of being the first among sinners to be forgiven. He isn't claiming that no one else was forgiven until after he, Paul was forgiven. He is saying the he is the premiere sinner, and yet he stands forgiven.

I have often been tempted to argue this point with Paul, for I know my sin, and since I see myself as "being as guilty as guilty can be" I am willing to declare that **I** am actually chief of sinners. The **Spirit** led Paul to write these words for a very important reason, and it wasn't so that

we could all line up and argue about who is actually the premiere sinner. It was so that we might comprehend by faith -

II. The Abundant Nature of the Grace of God!

Paul wrote in our text:

1 Timothy 1:13-16 “I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. ¹⁶ However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe - on Him for everlasting life.

It is significant that Paul acted in ignorance of the truth of Jesus Christ. Paul had been living in the darkness of unbelief until the Spirit caused the light of the gospel to shine on Paul’s heart. That is no excuse. It didn’t remove any of the guilt or condemnation due Paul for his sin. It is however a reminder for us that we not crucify Jesus anew with willful sinning, despising the gift of faith that the Spirit has given us. However when it comes to the grace of God, Paul’s former life reveals the extent of that forgiving grace. In God’s full and free forgiveness Paul received the grace which he cherished. The Apostle Paul after all that sin, was first called to faith, and then called to be an apostle, a special messenger of the gospel to the gentiles. The forgiving grace which Paul had received was to establish a pattern that others might see themselves under the forgiving grace of God.

The statement that was faithful and worthy of acceptance is that truth which was highlighted by our gospel lesson this morning, that Jesus reached out to sinners and ate with them, and taught them, and called them to be His disciples that they might know the forgiveness that comes to us through Jesus’ blood and righteousness.

In the very next chapter of this epistle to Timothy Paul asserted this truth *“God our Savior ... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*⁵ *For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,*⁶ *who gave Himself a ransom for all.”* (1 Timothy 2:4-6)

This is what Jesus revealed in His own ministry time and time again; when he called Matthew, a collector of Roman taxes, to be one of his disciples, when He called Zacchaeus to come down from the Sycamore tree and went to eat at his house with other tax collectors and sinners. **Christ came into the world to save sinners!**

Paul was the example the Spirit holds before the world that all might know the extent of God’s grace. He who was the chief of sinners was forgiven, and then called by God to proclaim the gospel to the world. We see the capacity of God’s grace as being greater than even the greatest pile of sins! Indeed Paul wrote in Romans 5, *“Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.”* And so the Holy Spirit would assure you of God’s forgiving grace, that you might know and believe that this Jesus who gave His life a ransom for sinners has both forgiven you and is your Mediator with God the Father, securing peace for you with God for time and eternity.

“Say not: ‘My sins are far too great,
His mercy I have scorned and slighted,
Now my repentance is too late;
I came not when His love invited.’
O trembling sinner, have no fear;
In penitence to Christ draw near.
Come now, tho’ conscience still is chiding;
Accept His mercy, e’er abiding.
Come; blest are they who this believe;
My **Savior** sinners doth receive.
My **Savior** sinners doth receive.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 386:4)

What a Savior! What a God! It is in praise of the God of his salvation that Paul ends this portion of his letter to Timothy.

1 Timothy 1:17 “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever.

Paul is making it clear that there is no other God, there is no one to be praised and honored and glorified other than this God who is King forever. He rules and directs all things for the fulfillment and advancement of His Gospel of salvation. He alone is wise. So many in the world question and doubt the ways of the Lord, but He alone is wise. There is no other God! Let us join in honoring Him in all our ways, ALL our ways, and glorifying His name forever and ever.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.