

13 August 2023 Romans 10:5-15 Pastor Fraser Pearce

Last week we heard about St Paul's love for his fellow Israelites,
And we thought about the loving attitude we are free to take
When it comes to family members who do not call on the Lord's name.
What we didn't hear about, but what St Paul goes on to talk about
In Romans, is God's ongoing commitment to his people,
And the fact that his promises to the patriarchs stand.

One of the practical issues that St Paul then deals with
Is the place of the law, of the torah, of God's instruction here and now.
St Paul doesn't say that God has dropped the law for something better,
Rather, just before today's reading, he says these words: **For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.** Romans 10:4
Now calling Christ the end of the law can be confusing,
Because it sounds as if the law has ended like a movie might end:
That's it's over, and it's time for something new.
But it's more like this: the end, or completion, or goal of an acorn
Is an oak tree: it's reached where it was going,
And so opened up a new reality.
Just so, the law has reached its *goal* in Christ:
He is the one who has kept it to completion,
And so our righteousness, our standing with God happens
As we place our trust not in *our* ability to fulfill the law,
But in *Christ's* fulfillment of the law for us.

Today I'm proclaiming good news from God's word:
Christ is not far from us: rather, as we receive the Good News
Of what he has done for us,
As we live out our baptismal calling of trusting Christ
And of confessing his name, Christ is with us,
And so we are receiving the gift of the salvation of our souls.

OK. Let's listen to how St Paul begins today's reading: **Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that 'the person who does these things will live by them.'** But the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" ' (that is, to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?" ' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say?

'The word is near you,
on your lips and in your heart'.

Now, to be sure, this can be difficult to understand,
But let me take you back to the book of Deuteronomy.
I think once you hear what's written there, things will become clearer.

The book of Deuteronomy is set just before God's people
Are about to enter into the promised land.

Moses, who can see where they are going, but can't join them,
Gives them a fresh proclamation of the Torah, the Law,
Of the instruction that God is giving them
As they prepare to end their wanderings and settle down.

As his proclamation comes to an end, he says these words: **Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.** Deuteronomy 30

Does this sound familiar?

It's what St Paul is alluding to and quoting from in today's reading.

Now, Moses is saying that the instruction that will guide them

In their new life is not difficult to obtain:

They don't need a stairway to heaven

Or a submersible to the abyss of the sea

To get this instruction, this law:

It's what he, Moses, has been proclaiming to them,

And what they themselves have taken in so they can repeat it aloud.

Now St Paul is saying that this same Law has found its completion,

Its end, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus,

So that the word is not far from his readers at Rome,

Is not far from us.

In fact, this is what St Paul says: **'The word is near you,**

on your lips and in your heart'

(that is, *the word of faith that we proclaim*);

The word that Moses spoke has reached its goal in Jesus,

So that St Paul's word, so that the Gospel,

Has the saving power that comes from keeping the law:

That comes from Jesus' completion of the law for us.

This is what St Paul goes on to say: **Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be**

put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Now there are many things that could be said about these words,
Especially when it comes to the way that the Gospel
Brings about unity with people from different ethnicities -
How it brings true unity between Jew and Gentile.

But today I want to draw your attention to these words:

For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved...

And the words from Joel that St Paul quotes: **For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’**

Let’s think about what St Paul might have had in mind

When he talks about confessing with the lips

And believing in the heart,

When he says that **‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’**

That last quote from Joel,

Does it come up anywhere else in the New Testament?

Anywhere significant?

On the day of Pentecost St Peter also quotes the same words from Joel

‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

And, like St Paul, St Peter proclaims that this Lord

Is none other than Jesus Christ, the one whom they (with us)

Had crucified.

For St Peter this calling on the Lord’s name

Takes a definite shape: *it looks like something* that we can relate to.

Listen to how the Pentecost day account goes on,

In fact, how it reaches its climax: **Now when [the people] heard [St Peter’s sermon], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles,**

‘Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.’ Acts 2

Being justified by Christ, who has fulfilled the Law,

Believing with one’s heart, confessing with one’s lips,

This happens on the day of Pentecost

As people receive the gift of holy baptism.

And in case you're understandably wondering
Whether St Paul would have thought about things this way
When it came to his own life, or to ours,
Listen to how St Paul recounts his own conversion
As it's recorded later in Acts.

Remember, by the way, that St Paul encountered the risen Christ,
Who sent him to Damascus, to a man named Ananias.

Here's what we read in Acts 22: **'A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, came to me; and standing beside me, he said, "Brother Saul, regain your sight!" In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. Then he said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.'**

Acts 22

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,
And the Lord is the Lord Jesus, who has fulfilled the Law,
And as we are baptised into him we share in his death,
And will just as surely share in his resurrection.

Dear brothers and sisters here at Bethlehem,
You are baptised into Christ Jesus,
But this isn't for *back then*, but for *here and now*.

You make use of your baptism as you trust
That Christ has fulfilled the Law for you,
And as you live by his Spirit in your life.

In our own Lutheran tradition we can do this in very simple ways,
As Luther encourages us in the Small Catechism:

When we wake in the morning, we can make the sign of the cross
And remember that we are baptised:

That Christ has fulfilled the Law for us,
That we can simply receive our status as children of God,
And live in the freedom this brings.

And likewise when we fall asleep,
As we let go into the preparation for death,

We can remember that we are baptised

As we make the sign of the cross, and entrust ourselves to the one
Who has fulfilled the Law, and who lives as reigns with the Father
And the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!