**Reformation 2017 – Commemoration of 500 years of the Reformation**

**Romans 3: 19-28**

19Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

 21But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, 22the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; 26it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. 27Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

**BACKGROUND:**

 The longest of all Paul’s letters, Romans was written as an introduction of Paul and his theology/thinking on faith to the young church in Rome. The letter deals with many ongoing concerns of faith and Christian experience rather than any specific situations in the Roman community. Far from being a complete systematic theology, the letter to the Romans seeks to build a bridge between the Church of Jerusalem and the lesser known Gentile Church in Rome4. Undermining the life of the church in Rome is the probable expulsion and return of Jews, making the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians tense and providing Paul an opportunity to address this neuralgic question prominent in the first century. The pericope under consideration here considers the revelation of God’s divine righteousness in Jesus Christ.

This periscope is further a rhetoric bridge drawing to a conclusion Paul’s reflections on the false righteousness of the Law and introducing the true righteousness in Christ Jesus.

**VERSE BY VERSE:**

19-20 serve as conclusion to large section (3:9-20) summarizing the role of he law leaving all “silent” before God, ie not one is righteous. The law in which Jews take great pride leaves hem condemned, conscious of their sins and inadequacies, but un able to offer a defense, that is a defense that will make a difference.

To be JUST or RIGHTEOUS is to uphold the covenant that YHWH has made with God’s people, UNRIGHTEOUSNESS is a breaking of the covenant through sin which is failure to trust God to be God. Because the covenant is an agreement made between UNEQUAL parties, it is not sufficient to merely restore the details of the agreement, ie get back to being covenant/law abiding people once more. What is broken is the relationships and attending to the details alone gets us nowhere. Only when the

relationship is restored can we live in true righteousness ala Jeremiah “I will be their God and they will be my people”

21- Vision which sees the futility of the law and new life that comes from the righteousness of Christ is grounded in an understanding that human beings are sinners unable to meet God’s standards for righteousness. For some protestants this is expressed in the “depravity” of humanity, but for Lutherans our incapacity will do, so long as it continues to challenge other attempts to make ourselves or any aspects of our lives right before God according to our own doing.

True righteousness is revealed in God’s plan in Jesus

22 – Because of universal condemnation, a universal righteousness is needed available to all, obtained by faith in Jesus Christ

TRANSLATIONS vary slightly between Faith IN Jesus Christ as the one in whom our faith rests vs the faith OF Jesus Christ as the Faith of Jesus in the Father via the spirit is the source of our reconciliation with God. Paul’s overall argument seems to favor the faithfulness of Christ to God rather than humanities faith in God.

25 – Jesus death on the Cross takes upon himself the holy wrath of God. God’s sending of the son for this purpose shows both God’s intense hatred of Sin and God’s intense love for the sinner. We however continue to propose theories of atonement that explain the exchange system and ignore the motivation behind he exchange.

 Hilasterion – propitiation or atonement – literally the cover on the top of the mercy seat that the high priest sprinkled with blood of a bull on day of atonement. This is ONLY time Paul uses this word. Also used 4 Maccabees to describe a loyal Jewish mother & seven sons who became martyrs in the Hasmonean revolt.

27-28 The first of several implications of Justification

1. Vv27-28 No more Grounds for boasting
2. Vv 29-30 No more racial/tribal divisions
3. 3- vv 31 No more struggling to meet requirements/demands of the Law

Paul insists God is the agent of righteousness, hence we have nothing to boast about, it is all God’s doing and at best we can bear witness/give thanks for God’s actions toward us/for us.

**An African Perspective** – Reconciliation among tribal rivalries holds many communities back from real development. When such reconciliation occurs the tribe/family grows as enemies become allies, he church works to build such bridges of peace so that water projects, gardens, roads, clinics and schools can be built to benefit all.

**THEOLOGY:**

 For 500 years these verses have been fuel for the ongoing battle between Roman Catholics and Lutherans (Evangelical Catholics. The covenant has been broken by our sin, and the covenant has been restored by Christ’s own faithfulness to the Father’s promise. Let that Faithfulness become manifest in the church today so that true unity may be known among the separated brothers and sisters.