

The Cross as the Center of the Center

April 14, 2019

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Jude 24-25

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship)

Read through Jude 24-25 as a group.

Icebreaker

What do you like to collect and why?

Text for Discussion: Romans 3:21-26

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

The heart of the Bible is Jesus's death on a cross. As Fleming Rutledge wrote, God "has come down from His throne into the world of sinful human flesh. Of His own free will, He came under His own judgment to deliver us from everlasting condemnation and bring us into eternal life. He has not required human sacrifice; He has himself become the human sacrifice." This is how God dealt with sin, once and for all.

Søren Kierkegaard defined sin as either pride or sloth. Pride, when we resist God's grace and try to justify our existence by building our identity around what we do, what we have, or what others think of us. Sloth, when we deny our true identity as those beloved by and belonging to God, reducing being a Christian to "going to church." Either way, we attempt to deny what is most true about us: that our true self is grounded in who God says we are in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Bible's word for setting us right is righteousness / justification. (These are the same word in Greek.) Justification is the opposite of condemnation, but it's not simply a pardon or forgiveness. Not only have we been set free from sin, we have been bestowed a new, righteous status as the worthy, beloved children of God.

The source of our justification is God and His grace. Every part of our salvation belongs to God. We were helpless and hopeless, and God took the initiative to save us. Grace is God's one-way love, and our holy Father is full of mercy, abounding in steadfast love.

Our justification rests on Christ and on His cross. God justifies freely by His grace, but how can He be true to His holy and perfect character, which demands justice, while also true to His loving and merciful heart, which is full of grace?

Redemption: This means "to pay a price to buy back," often out of slavery. Our sin has placed us in a grave and dire predicament, irredeemable from within. Nothing short of divine intervention can set us right. We stand in need of redemption, and we have been, by grace in Christ Jesus.

Propitiation: This means to placate someone's anger. God's wrath is directed at sin, which is killing the creatures He loves. There is nothing capricious about God's anger. It is because our Father cares so deeply that He is so deeply angered. (By extension, if God felt no wrath toward sin, He would actually be less loving.) It's important to note that we are not the ones doing the propitiating. God in His own great love

toward us, propitiated His own holy wrath through the gift of substituting Himself in our place – thus forgiving our sin without in any way condoning it.

Demonstration: The cross shows how God is both just and the justifier. God's justice was served when the sin of the world was punished. His righteousness was shown when He took it into His own life, thereby justifying the ungodly. In their great love, Father and Son together decided to do for us what we could never do for ourselves: redeem us.

How is the gift of justification received? The opposite of sin is faith. If sin means we don't see ourselves as we truly are before God, then faith means that we find our identity in what God says about us – that we are worthy, loved and accepted. Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Our ego dissolves when this captures our heart. With our self-centered voice quieted, we become vulnerable, capable of freely giving and receiving love. That is why we can hear a million times that we are loved and not believe it. It's only when we acknowledge our own weakness and surrender to God's grace that we can truly rest in our loving, holy Father.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How are we justified or made righteous before God?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- How would you tell someone what sin is in your own words? See Romans 3:23
- What does the righteousness of God mean? Who needs it? Who gets it?
- How are we justified or made righteous before God? Is there anything we need to do? Why or why not? See Romans 3:24
- What does propitiation mean? See Romans 3:25
 - What happens when we take away wrath from the character of God and only focus on His love?
 - What is God angry at and why?
 - According to the sermon, for whom did Christ die?
- Discuss how the death of Christ demonstrates that God is both just and the justifier. See Romans 3:26
- In what areas of life do you tend to justify or validate yourself apart from what God says about you?
 - Which do you identify with most 1) Pride ... I am what I do or what others think of me. 2) Sloth ... I'm not content with what God says about me.
 - What personal applications can you make?
- How do the truths of Romans 3:21-26 give rest to God's people? How do they give you rest?

Prayer

Practice lectio divina (sacred reading) by reading Romans 3:21-26 over attentively, then entering into prayer through a single word or phrase from the passage. Meditate on the word or phrase as a love note from God who loves you abundantly. Thank the Lord for His abundant grace, His one-way love, and His gift of Himself for our redemption.

Experiment of the Month

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Spiritual Formation Experiment - Either by yourself or with a friend, read through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6-7. List all the warnings Jesus gives. Your list will be a mosaic of what the Christian life should look like according to Jesus. Commit to following His ways.

Missional Experiment - If you have not done so, visit a kitchen or homeless shelter in your community. Record in your journal the effects of the visit on you. Share with your Community Group. Discuss the Mission of PCC and how it fits in with Community Groups. How is your group Gathering, Growing, and Sending?