

have mercy, Lord, have mercy. *One, because of our sin we need God's mercy. Two, because of Christ we receive God's mercy.* True faith trusts both things! Repentance and faith always go together!

And when we receive the forgiveness of sins, which can be received only by faith – given only by God's grace – we also receive Christ's perfect righteousness by that same faith. You need to be righteous to go to heaven. That righteousness is an external righteousness then. It's not your own. It doesn't come from within. The Christian cannot be convinced in themselves that they are righteous. God declares you righteous because of Jesus. Jesus' perfect righteousness covers you. **Galatians 3:27, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."**

Do *you* believe that in God's sight *you* are righteous? That question should always first cut us to the heart. No, I am not righteous. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. But in the same breath of repentance, we can answer in faith, "Yes." Yes, I am righteous in God's sight because of Jesus. His perfect righteousness covers me. I trust Christ's righteousness becomes my righteousness. It is with this confession that we can leave here today, each to our own homes, and know for certain that we went to our homes justified just as the tax collector did in the parable.

Paul writes in our Epistle, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9).** We sang this in the Opening Hymn (LSB #566): "By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless. My soul, believe and doubt it not. Why stagger at this word of promise? Has Scripture *ever* falsehood taught? No! Then this word must true remain. By grace you, too, will life obtain!"

For those of you who grew up on the old TLH, this hymn had a wonderful verse that sadly was omitted in our current hymnal. In verse 1, we urged our souls to believe and doubt it not. But sometimes, we struggle to believe. Our sinful flesh wants to doubt. Satan is always trying to pluck the seed of faith from us. The omitted verse offers great comfort when we are afflicted with doubt: "By grace! Oh, mark this word of promise, When thou art by thy sins opprest, When Satan plagues thy troubled conscience, And when thy heart is seeking rest. What reason cannot comprehend, God by His grace to thee doth send."

How does God send you rest from a troubled conscience? He sends you His Word and Sacrament. *The Word bestows faith which receives the forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament.* With the assurance of the Good News of Christ crucified we do not leave the temple standing far off, beating our breast in shame. But in the assurance of faith we draw near with a true heart (**Heb 10:22**) and look confidently at the Lord's face who shines upon us and is gracious unto us, who lifts up His countenance upon us and grants us His peace (**Num 6:24-26**).

You need to be righteous to go to heaven. **"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself"** by confessing his sin and looks to Christ for his righteousness **"will be exalted" (Lk 18:14)** with the name above every other name.

You have been given that name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in your Baptism. You have been cloaked with Christ's perfect righteousness. Believe it. By faith, Christ's righteousness becomes your righteousness. When you believe this God must declare you righteous for Jesus' sake. That's His promise! And God cannot lie! His forgiveness even covers, as we prayed in the Collect, "those things of which our conscience is afraid" and He gives "us those good things that we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediations of Christ, our Lord." You need to be righteous to go to heaven, and it is Christ who makes you righteous! You want the comforting assurance that you're going to heaven? Believe that. In Jesus' name, Amen.