

“Justified by Faith”

[The video, *“The First Action Hero”* was shown prior to the Prelude.]

The New Revised Standard Version of Romans 5:1 states, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. Please note, it reads slightly different from what I read from our Pew Bible’s Good News Version. Our Bulletin Cover and the NRSV’s translation both include the words, “justified by faith”. I hope everyone noticed the title of this message is “Justified by Faith”. Unfortunately, the understanding of that phrase in our society tends to interpret “faith” to be a works righteousness and the word, “justified” to be the earning of forgiveness. I said “unfortunately” because the Apostle Paul’s intended meaning was exactly the opposite of that common understanding. So, in this message, we will delve into what Paul’s writing in our Scripture Reading was meant to communicate and its implications for our lives and relationship with God and one another.

Let me begin by submitting, the first sentence from our Unison Confession in the Bulletin provides a summary of the process Paul wrote about in our Scripture. The beginning of our Unison Confession declared, “God of Grace, Love, and Approval, You sent Jesus Christ, to give us the gift of Faith, a New Faith Relationship with You, and Peace!” Verse 1 from our Pew Bible’s version is much more helpful in its presentation of the process, which the NRSV translated as “justified by faith”. **The Pew Bible’s translation of verse 1 states, “Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** We have been put right with God – justified – through God’s Gift of Faith! Faith is a process through which we are brought into a New Faith Relationship with our Divine Parent by our God and are, thus, experiencing peace in that relationship with God, one another, and with many other persons. The way we receive this Gift of Faith is “through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The cultural assumption of how we come to receive this Faith Relationship with God is by God’s Son paying the required sacrifice to buy our forgiveness. **However, the Apostle Paul wrote in verse 2, “He [meaning Jesus] has brought us by faith into this experience of God’s Grace, in which we now live.”** The New Faith Relationship with God – “this experience of God’s Grace” is what we live after we have received the Gift of Faith through Jesus. Our Savior did not have to suffer and die to pay God for our sins but to provide the proof of our Divine Parent’s Agape Love for us to us. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ provides us the final proof we need to be receptive of God’s Gift of Faith! Because of what God did in Jesus Christ, God’s Son, in his public ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection, we and many others trust God’s Agape Love for us – receive the Gift of Faith! Because we live in peace with our Divine Parent but in conflict with the world’s values, as a result of being Reconciled with God through our Faith, Paul described how our lives include difficulties and hardships and he explained in **verse 4, “endurance brings God’s approval, and His approval creates hope.”**

In our Call to Worship based on Psalm 100:3, we joined in part of the insight we receive through God’s Gift of Faith. We declared, “Acknowledge that the LORD is God. He made us, and we belong to Him; we are His people, we are His flock.” That understanding of our Loving Faith Relationship with God is very much in line with Paul’s explanation of the depth of God’s and Jesus’ Agape Love for us, which he shared in **verses 6 and 8, “For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose. ... God has shown us how much He loves us — it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!”**

The following video states the heart of our response to God's and Jesus' Agape Love for us. [The video, "My Heart" was shown.] As we consider how we are to respond to God's Love and Gift of Faith, the declaration of the video's creator is a good example for us to examine and adopt to help us gain insight. Let's consider some of its message. As we seek to live out our New Faith Relationship with God, we naturally love Jesus with all we are and love others as Jesus has loved us. We are called to let our lives be a "testimony so people can see Jesus in" us. We are to share how Faith changed our lives. We are to express the hope we have because of our New Faith Relationship with God and one another through Jesus Christ! Indeed, we joined again with Psalm 100:5, as we spoke in the Call To Worship, "The LORD is good; His love is eternal and His faithfulness lasts forever."

In our Unison Confession, we celebrated how God enables us to live out the New Faith Relationship with God, one another, and with others. We said to God, "You have given us the gift of the Holy Spirit through which You have poured out Your love into our hearts! Enable us to live with You and one another in Your Love and Peace, so others are welcomed into it."

The Apostle Paul urged us to have faith in God's Constant Agape Love and celebrated in **verse 5**, **"God has poured out His Love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us."**

The Trustworthiness of our Divine Parent, our honoring and celebrating of our Fathers, and our Opening Father's Day Video suggest important aspects of the New Faith Relationship and New Life in Christ, which we are called to demonstrate in our everyday lives. "The First Action Hero" video declared how dads – and for that matter all who belong to God and Jesus Christ – are to reflect something greater than the greed and selfish ambition shown by the world. The video stated, our "mission is clear." The video added some humor when giving examples of our mission, "If there is a need, take care of it. If there is stress, relieve it. If there is pain, kiss it and make it better." The video's maker reminded us we are to reflect our Creator. We are to be an example to our "children and to lead with a humble and sacrificial heart." The video concluded, **"THERE ARE THINGS IN THIS WORLD WORTH THE SACRIFICE – WORTH PROTECTING. THE FIRST ACTION HERO WAS YOUR DAD. REAL MEN SERVE LIKE CHRIST."** Again, dads or men are to serve like Christ but also are mothers and women and children!

Finally, there is another aspect of what it means for us to live out our being "justified" – "made right with God" – living the New Faith Relationship and New Life in Christ. The Chancel Voices' Anthem is a beautiful expression of this addition element of the call we share. The Anthem is titled, "Whoever Welcomes You Welcomes Me". The Anthem began by asking questions about where we will find Jesus, what he will look like, and when he will come. Jesus' answers are: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me ... whatever you look like, I will look like, too; I will speak in your words and in ev'rything you do. Whenever my advent is ... you discover I am in you, – when you discover I AM in you!" The Anthem wonderfully expressed our God Is Still Speaking Message – God and Jesus Christ call us to share the Extravagant and Radical Hospitality, Invitation, and Welcome into the New Faith Relationship with God to all people – to be instruments of God's Constant Agape Love and Grace!

Trusting – Faithing in God's Constant Agape Love and Faithfulness, let us celebrate how God has put us right with God's Self as a Gift of Grace and, further, has given us the Gift of Faith through Jesus Christ, as well as, the Gift of God's Constant Presence in the Holy Spirit, so we are able to live in the New Faith Relationship and New Life in Christ. Let us follow the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be agents of God's Constant Agape Love and Radical and Extravagant Invitation, Acceptance, and Welcome to all people! Amen.