

THE FESTIVAL OF THE REFORMATION
October 31, November 3 & 4, 2007
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

NO ONE IS LEFT OUT Romans 3:19-24

There are times when I drive by a school and see students out for recess, I notice many students playing games together, standing and talking with each other. But I also will observe a student or two all by themselves. They aren't playing with the rest. They aren't walking around talking with other classmates. They are sitting all by themselves. They appear to have been left out of the game or ignored by their classmates. They look so alone and sad. Some of you may have experienced that while you were in school or while you are still in school. You were not athletic. You didn't want to play kickball, football or basketball. The few friends that you thought you had suddenly seemed to ignore you and now you were all by yourself. That is not a pleasant experience and it hurts. All of us want to belong. We don't want to be left out. We want to feel that we are a part of group.

Today as we celebrate the Festival of the Lutheran Reformation the word of God before us reminds us of a very important truth. As we study this portion of Paul's letter to the Romans we focus on this truth **NO ONE IS LEFT OUT**. None of us here today has been excluded. We are not off sitting all by ourselves in a corner of the playground alone and forgotten. Every one of us has been included in the word of God. Now this fact is **I) A Frightening Reality**. It is also **II) A Comforting Security**.

WE ARE NOT LEFT OUT IS A FRIGHTENING REALITY

Since most of us do not like to be left out, why is being included a frightening reality? What is so frightening and terrifying by being included and being considered as a part of some larger group? The Apostle Paul points out that every one of us, he included cannot get right with God and we are sinful and keep on sinning and separating ourselves from our Creator.

You like to be right, don't you? We all like to think that we are right. In fact, we may at times become rather loud and emphatic that we are right, even when we may be wrong. We wouldn't be saying what we say or doing what we do if we didn't believe that we were right and correct in our words and actions. At times those of us who are Christian can come off also as believing that we are always right. Paul addresses all of us, Christians, non-Christians, the entire human race.

Paul is writing this letter to the Christian congregation in Rome. This congregation was made up mostly of Gentiles, non-Jewish people. It appears that the congregation also had members who were Jewish and who had been brought to believe by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was the promised Savior that God has promised to Adam and Eve, to Abraham and to David. Paul speaks to both groups of people, those who had the Law of God given to Moses and the Israelites on Mt. Sinai and also to the Gentiles who had the natural law which had been written in man's heart at creation. Paul writes, "Now we know that whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." (v. 19) Here Paul is singling out the Jews in the Christian congregation in Rome and noting that the law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai silences the mouths of every Jew because they could not and cannot keep that law. Paul now turns to the non-Jewish members of the Roman congregation and says, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing law; rather through law we become conscious of sin." (v. 20) This applies to you and me. We cannot be right with God because we do not keep the law. The law reveals our sins to us. If you and I are truly honest and open about our thoughts, our words and actions we must admit that we do not love God with all our heart, mind and soul and we do not love others as much as we love ourselves. That reality applies to every one of us here in this assembly today and it applies to every human being that is breathing and walking

on this planet at this moment. As Paul later concludes, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Vv. 22c&23)

This truth struck terror into the heart of Martin Luther. He grew up in a time when the church of his day taught people that they had to do something in order to get right with God. They had to pay for their sins and do certain actions in order to get right with God. No matter how hard Luther tried to find inner peace by doing things on his own, he could not find that peace and comfort that he so desperately needed. He lived in terror of going to hell. In fact, he almost came to hate God because God demanded from him something Luther knew that he could not supply. He realized that he could not be holy. He understood clearly that he was sinful from birth and he kept on sinning even when he was trying to do good. Luther experienced the terrible reality of knowing that he was not left out. He was one of those sinners just as you and I are. That is a frightening reality to begin to understand how completely corrupt and evil you really are and then to recognize how even the good that you attempt to do is still stained with improper motives. If you dwell on this you are driven to despair and hopelessness. There’s no way out. There’s nothing I can do. I can’t get right with my God and Maker.

WE ARE NOT LEFT OUT IS A COMFORTING SECURITY

But that is not the whole message. There is more and the rest of the message reminds us that we are not left out either. This truth brings us a comforting security. Paul reveals to us that we have been declared righteous by God because of the work of Jesus Christ. All have been pronounced not guilty and through trusting in Jesus that is my personal treasure and assurance.

After Paul has us despairing and hopeless if we think that we can do anything to get right with God he then announces this life giving and life changing message. “But now a righteousness apart from law has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Vv. 21-24)

Even though we are guilty and God knows it and so do we. God has said, “I pronounce you not guilty.” Many of us have watched court cases when the person accused waits for the jury to come in. We have seen the reaction when the jury announces that they have found the person accused not guilty. There are tears of joy and sighs of relief. We have also seen the other reaction when the jury comes in and says to the judge that they have found the defendant guilty. The wonderful news for us is that even though we are guilty, God has declared us not guilty. Isn’t that great? We don’t have to be punished eternally for our sins. Why not? Paul writes, “we have been justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (v. 24) Jesus Christ paid the penalty that we should suffer. He lived the holy life that God demands of us and we cannot give to him. Jesus endured the torments of hell that we should suffer and God has said, “I accept the payment my son made for you and I pronounce you not guilty.” You are free. Your guilt has been pardoned. Your sin has been paid for.

This verdict has been pronounced over the entire human race. Just as all have sinned so all have been justified. Every person you ever meet has been declared by God to be not guilty because of the blood of Jesus Christ. Even those who eventually end in hell were declared by God to be righteous. Then why were they lost and ended up in hell? They didn’t believe it. They rejected the free forgiveness that God has offered to them. As Paul writes, “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” (v. 22) And our faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard in the word of Christ.

When you have questions and doubts does God love me am I really forgiven, ask yourself, and “Am I a part of the human race? Of course I am. What does the Bible say about all human beings? We have been justified

freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (v. 24) Jesus lived and died for me. God has declared me righteous in his sight because of Jesus Christ.

When Martin Luther discovered this life giving truth, it changed him. He faced the opposition of the church of his day. He faced being declared an outlaw by the government of his day. He was excommunicated by the church. Yet Luther refused to recant or change unless he could be proven wrong on the basis of the Bible, God's Word and God's Word only. May God give all of us the same conviction that we will never yield the truth of God's Word that we are saved by Jesus Christ and him alone, through faith alone, by grace alone.

Amen.