

JUNE 15, 2019 SERMON by JOHN TSCHUDY

SCRIPTURE LESSON - TRINITY SUNDAY ROMANS 5:1-5; JOHN 16:12-15

Central to Paul's theology and most Protestant theology from the line of Luther is what is called "Justification by Faith." Justification is being put in the right relationship with God or what may also be called "salvation" or just "Being saved." For Paul Justification comes in one way and one way only and that is by having Faith in God. Faith is not just believing in God but also trusting in God to the point that we are willing to live our lives according to the will of God at work in the world. With being "justified" we receive from God the "Grace of God." This includes such things as being loved by God, forgiven by God for all of the sins we have committed. Paul says that we also receive support from God in our sufferings. Paul realizes that following the Will of God will put us at odds with the world and we will have struggles and suffer in this world because of our Faith in God and the beliefs that come from that Faith. But we shouldn't look at that suffering as punishment or a sign of weakness but rather a sign of our being willing to struggle with the world's way, as we seek to do God's Will in that world. With God's help we will endure the struggles and get stronger in our Faith and ability to face the struggles of life. As we get stronger we will develop attitudes of hope that enables us to face even harder struggles. It is because God's love and God's Spirit is a part of our lives, making us stronger than we ever thought we could be.

In the Gospel Lesson we go back to when Jesus is preparing the disciples for the time when he will no longer be physically with them. Here is one of those times when he promises the disciples and us that God will send the Holy Spirit into the world to be their guide and help in the world. One of the things Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will help them do is know what is the truth because the Holy Spirit will bring to them the Word of God. Speaking for Jesus and saying the Word that God has given to him, we will be guided into what is the truth, not only about God but about the world and what we are called to do. How many of us think to offer a prayer before we watch the news or pick up a paper or magazine and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to guide us in knowing what is true and what isn't? How often do we put our "faith" in the reporter or the station to tell us the truth, rather than asking God to help sort out the truth? Notice, I'm not saying put your faith in the church but rather go over the church's head directly to God to know what the truth is. Central to the beliefs of our tradition is that we don't need to go through someone else to have contact with God or Jesus. Rather because God has put the Holy Spirit within us, we can have direct contact with God. The church's role is to help us find others who will support us, and that we can support as they struggle through life's journey. The church is here to remind us that we are not facing life's struggles by ourselves. Rather we have the help of God and other people to help us, support us and guide us. We are not alone in life's struggles but bound together with the family of God and the Body of Christ, in our struggles in this sometimes hostile world.

The ultimate question for Christians is not things such as; "Are we born again", "How do we view scripture," "Where do we go to church," "How much water was used when we were baptized and when was it done," or where do we stand on various social and political issues. Rather the question is do we have Faith in God, in Jesus Christ? Are we willing to trust in God using the teachings and example of Jesus Christ as the basis of how we live our lives? The church sometimes sets standards or rules for salvation that can be measured or judged by people and ignore the question of a person having Faith in God and trusting in God. To many traditions want people to believe that they have the real path to heaven all laid out in their teachings. One of the things I like about the UCC, is we have traditionally recognized that we cannot measure the Faith a person has or judge what God feels is just or acceptable. Only God can judge the true nature of a person and judge the faith that they have. It is up to God to set the standards of Justification. When I'm asked if I am saved, my standard answer is "I don't know" because it is up to God and God will tell me at the proper time. I just live my life making sure I'm ready when that time comes.