

**Sermon: 2020/06/21 (3rd Sunday after Pentecost, Year A) - Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10,16-17; Romans 6:1b-11; &, Matthew 10:24-39\_BTR**

[Umbrella hidden beneath pulpit.]

You know, one of my *absolute*, very *favourite* hymns is one that we don't even sing.  
(Here at St. Matthew's, that is.)

It isn't found in the "82 Hymnal, you see.)

And it's called, 'Before The Throne of God Above'

It was written by Charitie Lees Bancroft - an Irish lass.

*An anglican(!)*, in fact.

Daughter of a vicar too.

And, eventually, an emigre to the United States.

She wrote it in the early 1860s.

(I know it to a newer tune, when it began to circulate again in this century.)

And what I love about it is how she captures what could be some pretty complex theology - the theology of "justification" - that's the (technical) jargon - in a single, short, *pithy* verse.

Now, of course, we heard last week Saint Paul himself describing such things for us in the epistle reading to the *Romans*, chapter 5, and I do suggest looking at it again yourself - it contains many of those *key* ideas that really unlock the Christian mental-universe.

That sharpens the distinctiveness of the (true) Faith vis-a-vis other religions.

But Paul's chosen wording might not make *immediate* sense to you...

So, what Charitie does is *simplify* the meaning of justification - *and beautifully*; she describes it as follows - I quote:

'Because the sinless Savior died,  
My sinful soul is counted free;  
For God, the Just, is satisfied  
To look on *Him* [gesture to the crucifix] and pardon *me*.'

And this is, I said to you (last time), the 'foolishness'; the *nonsense*, which is the glorious Gospel - that we Christians are sinners, *yet* by Jesus' atoning death are, nonetheless, regarded in Heaven as *saints*: as innocent as new born babes.

As if straight from the womb, having committed (or thought) no wrongs.

Pure and perfect.

And *thank God* He has arranged all this.

It means that, at the time of the General Resurrection, I have - on the Cross - been given my "get out of jail free" card.

(Metaphorically) it is like a "swipe-pass" to eternal life in Heaven;  
and on it is *my* photo, but the *biographical* information is Jesus'!

So what do I do about the fact that I *know* myself (still) to be, despite God's grace - *none* of what I described.

I'm not innocent.

I'm not "pure;"

not "perfect."

Not, well...*Jesus*.

I'm Ben.

Which is to say: I'm an imposter.

A fraud.

A fake.

Well, this is *exactly* what Saint Paul anticipates was on the minds of those people to whom he wrote in Rome.

(The congregation there.)

We hear him tackling this matter in chapter 6 this morning.

Those men and women - the next generation of disciples after The Twelve - were wondering to themselves (something like): "What do I do next?"

It's a natural question!

"If I'm sinless, why do I still sin?"

Some were tempted - and have always been tempted - to imagine that life after justification; after confession is of no or little salvific consequence.

Such people brandish their "swipe-pass"; their "get out of jail free card" as if it were a licence for...well, licentiousness.

[Open umbrella.]

They treat the grace given to them by Christ's sacrifice as *if* it were an umbrella - an "umbrella" that shields them from God seeing and judging their actions *going forward*.

That permanently blocks Him from passing judgment.

And underneath it they might do as they want; indulge all their appetites.

This was, perhaps, a particularly acute problem for the Christians Paul was writing to in Rome because they were, by and large, Jews.

And having spent most of their lives aspiring to some pretty stiff, *ambitious* rules and regulations - the Levitical laws - to suddenly be told that that stuff no longer *bound* them must have been *exhilarating!*

Like a prisoner whose jail-door suddenly swings open.

That "swipe-pass" to Heaven - the "get out of jail free card" - must have felt like getting your hands on mum and dad's creditcard.

Let's let our hair down.

Anything goes!

But is this what Paul says?

'By no means!' He replies.

That's verse 2.

'[Y]ou...must consider yourselves dead to sin'. (Verse 11.)

Hear that word: 'consider.'

Because you're not *actually* 'dead' to sin are you?

I acknowledged this at the beginning.

You *will* be tempted.

You *will* slip up.

But Paul urges us to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, adopt a new attitude; a "new attitude" where we make choices *imagining* ourselves to be different, *better* people.

It's like a game.

A, a... "thought-experiment."

- There I am, going about my business, in the world, all kinds of seductions around, and what Paul says is that I should respond to those "seductions" by trying to picture what a *genuinely* sinless "Ben" - a genuinely sinless you - would do, and. Then. Do. That.

Hence: 'consider yourselves dead to sin'.

And we should do this not to win merit badges with our Savior, but because He already did so much more on our behalves.

(On Good Friday.)

Let us pray: ...

