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Justified by Death and Resurrection

It's not you. It's me.

Well, it is not about you. But, let me tell you a little about me. My former self- former self's plural, actually, would judge me so hard.

In so many ways, I have become the person I used to despise. The way that I view the world and other people, and even the way I think about myself has changed. And, if I'm honest it's changed quite a few times. How I articulate my faith has too. And in ways I could have never predicted or imagined. The ways that I articulate faith and my own relationship with God have certainly not stayed moving in a straight line. And, the strength of my convictions, and my own levels of confidence and trust in God have waxed and waned over the years.

I remember the first time I felt like I was losing my faith. I did not choose to go down this path, where it felt like everything I knew was thrown up into question. I never saw it coming. I was so sure of everything before that. It felt like the entire house of cards I had built my faith with was falling apart piece by piece. My own experience was betraying it. My identity was slowly slipping from my grasp. I had so many questions, any answers seemed cheap and illusive at best and offensive at worst.

And, if you would have asked me, I would have said I *believed*, somehow, some way, that I was *justified* (there's that word from our parable) *by faith*. A gift. Even still, it seemed like it was up to me. After all, it was *my* faith. I was somehow responsible for its fortitude or lack thereof, right? Its existence at all was up to me a little bit, anyway.

It's not you. I assumed it was about me.

In his book *The Chaos Machine* Max Fisher explores how social media has rewired not only our minds but also our world. So much of what he talks about, we know from our own experience. Social media has revealed in stark relief the great lengths we will go for approval, confirmation, and validation. And the work we put into crafting identities that show ourselves in the best possible light. And, how this leads to comparison, judgment, competition, conflict, and the endless cycles of outrage and division. Our side is correct, of course. We're justified. Trusting in ourselves, regarding others with contempt.

In a simple understanding of this parable we aim to be humble like the tax collector and pray the right kind of prayers, and move on out the door. Thinking, then we are justified.

The problem is that it is still about us. Not to mention, we get caught up in casual anti-semitism, by caricaturing and scapegoating the pharisee, assuming that all pharisees or Jewish people must be like him. Which could not be further from the truth. Many faithful Pharisees would have been just as shocked as we are about the way he is portrayed.

Focusing too much on these two people keeps us trapped in the same cycle of self-obsession that leaves us without any way out. We only spiral faster and faster inward and more isolated.

Eventually, we will come face to face with our fleeting faith's inadequacies like I did. Answers grow shallow. Life happens. We change. Complexity arises. Our trust gets slim and our confidence rocky. And no matter how genuine our prayer for mercy may sound coming off our lips sometimes it seems like it just bounces off the ceiling. And, our humility can only get us so far before we start feeling proud about it, and posting it online to garner more likes. Wait? It's just more burdens on our already weary shoulders that are carrying so much.

As Pastor Lyle, and our confirmands reminded us last week. Faith is so much more than our own efforts to keep it afloat. After all, faith that makes us right before God and justifies us is itself a gift given in these waters.

The tax collector is justified by the one telling the parable. Jesus, who humbles himself by being exalted high upon the cross. Poured out like a libation, you and I are born from his wounded side. Joined to his death we have met every criteria for our justification. As one theologian said, "we are justified by death."

Raised again with him today, endless life is ours. Condition met! The tombs the world traps us into have been opened. We are now *free*. Free to question, lament, weep, struggle, and live life honestly. We can *call a thing what it is*. No longer beholden to echo chambers or the perpetual climb up the corporate or spiritual ladder. Come down. You have nothing left to prove. The ideal version of life, faith, and our own identities are illusions anyway. Condition met, we can live life that is clear eyed with all the ambiguity of a broken world. We can even have mercy on ourselves. Even forgiving those former selves.

We are carried through every day by the one who has promised us that in his hands all our todays will ultimately lead to a home where sin and death are things of old and all of life is rightly sorted out by the Son. Our endless light and only judge. Christ has got it. It's on him. Not you.

So, it's not you. And, it's not about me. The object of our faith is the one who justifies.

Now, we join our voices with the one who cries "mercy." In unvarnished prayers we cry out knowing we are always heard and know the end of the story no matter how many pages are left.

***Justified:* those personal pleas for mercy can blend with intercessions of mercy for this suffering world, like Irmgard will today. Transformed now, those words become works of mercy for our neighbors sake. On the other side of death, it's not about me. It's about you----->Them.**

On the Sunday before Reformation, we are reminded of one of Luther's insights. In Christ, You and God are good. So, turn to the other each morning.

We pray:

Lord have mercy on those who are in prison, and then send them Christmas cards, like our evangelism committee is inviting us to do.

Lord have mercy on those who are refugees, far away from home. And then welcome them into a new dwelling.

Lord have mercy on those who suffer violence and oppression, and then do the hard work of dismantling systems that perpetuate that violence and oppression.

Lord have mercy on those who are strangers, and take the risk to reach out to one. Creating a new place where you both belong.

Condition met. Let us live lives of beloved children of God. Co-workers with Elliott and Madeline (baptized at 11). As holy and righteous as we'll ever be. From those waters, still wet, we are compelled to join our justifying God in making God's justice our own work until it is our eternal reality.