

SERMON

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Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. That's what our reading from Romans chapter 10 says. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.

To help us see what that means though, let's go back to our Gospel reading first. Do you remember, Jesus is walking on the lake. He's literally walking on the water towards his disciples, who are being buffeted by the wind and the waves in their little boat.

That must have been quite scary for them, don't you think? I mean, I get quite scared when there's just a little bit of turbulence on an aeroplane, so I can only imagine what it must have been like for them! But the first thing that Jesus says to them is "Don't worry, don't panic, take courage! It's me. Don't be afraid."

Of course, Peter was the most fearless of them all, it seems. And he's soon out of the boat and walking on the water as well, because Jesus made it so. But then he loses his courage. Why? Why does he lose his courage? Well, because he stops looking at Jesus, he gets anxious about the wind and the waves instead, and he calls out "Lord, save me!"

And immediately, Jesus reaches out his hand, and catches him. He's safe. Because, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Now, in this letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul is explaining something to his friends in Rome. See some people are not happy with him, they're particularly not very happy with him that he's always trying to tell people about Jesus. And particularly, that he's always busy telling Gentiles about Jesus. See, there was a huge divide in that society between Jews and Gentiles. Neither side liked each other very much. But Paul is trying to break down that wall of hostility, through his preaching of the Good News.

And here in Romans chapter 10, I think he's showing us why that has always been God's plan. He's not being disloyal to his own people by trying to reach out to others. Because that is what the Old Testament always told us we should do.

But first there's this contrast, in verse 5. He says, "Moses writes about this righteousness that is by the law: 'The person who does these things will live by them.'" He's talking about the Old Testament Law, the dos and don'ts of religion, the ten commandments. If you do this, you'll be righteous, you'll be accepted.

Some people had made it about "who's part of the in-crowd?", "who's one of us?" Like today, there are always campaigns and slogans, badges and flags, for us to signal our virtue on the issues of the day, to show that we're on the right side of things. If we don't do that thing, we're meant to feel ashamed of ourselves, guilty, maybe we're meant to feel fearful of reprisals, of being tarred with a negative label, or of being left out.

And we can make ourselves righteous again, by doing whatever the latest campaign says it is that we are supposed to do.

But Paul contrasts that “righteousness that is by law” with the way of Jesus, as it was announced beforehand, already in the Old Testament. He says, “If you declare with your mouth that, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

It’s about faith in a person, the Lord, Jesus Christ. It’s about following and obeying him as our Master, our Lord. Because Scripture always said it would be so. It says, verse 11, that “anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” That’s a quote from Isaiah the prophet (you may find a note saying that, in your Bible). And Scripture also says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Again, that’s a quote from the prophet Joel.

So, Paul is contrasting legal religion and worldly morality, with the way of Jesus.

To deal with shame and guilt, and to know what right and wrong really are, we must follow, not Twitter, not Instagram, not a political party or the latest campaign, we must follow and trust in the Lord, Jesus.

And that means that nobody needs to be excluded. At the moment in our culture, many people are worried about inclusion and diversity. And that’s OK, Jesus created those things and so they’re good things to be concerned about.

But the way to have true inclusion, the way to have real diversity, is not by laying down a law. It’s by Jesus laying down his life for us and calling us to tread that sacred way that Jesus watered with his blood.

This really is a Gospel, a piece of beautiful, lovely Good News. Because the way of Jesus, it’s not about purging ourselves of guilt and shame, or somehow trying to earn God’s favour. We can’t. I find it impossible to always do and say the right things.

And the Good News is, Jesus has done everything necessary, all we need to do is call out “Lord, save me!”

The way of Jesus, it’s not about shaming others into compliance, by exposing them and no-platforming them or trolling them on Twitter until they give in to your demands. No, the Gospel is about Jesus carrying our sorrows and bearing our guilt and our shame. He lived the life I could not live and died the death that I deserve.

I can never be good enough. Romans says, “There’s no one righteous, no, not even one.” We deserve only the wind and waves of God’s perfect judgment. But God is merciful and kind. So, whoever we are, wherever we’re from, whatever we’ve done, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, will be saved.”

So, let’s not panic, let’s not panic, whatever is happening all around you. Instead, let’s turn from our sin, and call out to him. “Lord, save me!”, “Lord, save me!” and he will immediately reach out and catch you. He is the only one to turn to, now, through all of life’s storms, and in the hour of our death.

He is our Cornerstone, our solid Ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.