



It's Not About You
Ephesians 2:1-10

4th in the Lenten sermon series "Covenants: Promises, Promises"

Sunday, March 11th, 2018 ♦ Fourth Sunday in Lent
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
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Have you ever wondered if you're "good enough"? Good enough to go to heaven? Have you ever woken up in the early morning hours and wondering? If so, maybe you can take comfort in knowing that the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther had the same worry. As a German monk he prayed to St. Anne to make him "righteous enough". He fasted and confessed and did penitence, and practiced all of the spiritual disciplines of the Church but he could never get the feeling that he was "good enough" or that he had "done enough". And then one night as he read Romans 1: 17 Paul's words jumped out at him, "We are made righteous through faith". Being good enough, being righteous enough, is not about what we do; it is about faith. And Faith is a gift from God.

In today's lesson we read, for by faith you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God--not the result of works, lest anyone should boast. (vss. 8&9)

Did you hear that? Really hear it? Faith is a gift not a work. You don't have to earn enough points to hit the magic "heavenly score." As a matter of fact, even if you did, you couldn't ever do it no matter how hard you tried. Why? Because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Nor can you go to a spiritual gymnasium and lift "faith weights" because such a gym does not exist.

Faith is like manna. When God provided manna to the Israelites during their 40 year wilderness journey, they were told that they could not save it for a rainy day. God would provide and they would have to learn to trust in God's Promise, God's covenant, to provide their "daily bread." When Corrie ten Boom was a young girl she frequently worried about whether or not she would have enough faith to die as a martyr for Jesus. This was her worry as her native Holland and much of Europe fell under the boot of Nazi Germany. One night her father spoke to her about this worry as he tucked her into bed. Kneeling beside her bed he asked her, "When you are going to visit family when do I give you your train ticket? A week before? A day before your journey?" "No". she replied, "you give it to me as I get on the train." "That's how it is with Faith," her father continued. "God gives you the faith you need when you need it and not a moment before." That night stuck with her as she and her family entered a concentration camp. It stayed with her as she held her dying sister. It carried her throughout life after the camp.

Last week while I was driving back to Peoria on Route 29 I saw a billboard that simply said, "He first loved us". It had been paid for by the Peoria Rescue Mission. That billboard says it all. When I teach confirmation classes I tell them we are not good to earn "brownie points" or get "stars in the crown". Nor are we trying to earn our way into "heaven" or "win" "God's love". The baptismal font in the

middle of the chancel reminds us of the truth contained in I John 4, namely, “we love God because God first loved us.” We do not baptize the worthy or the loveable but the loved. And the communion table that sits directly behind the font reminds us of God continual love that feeds, nurtures and supports us through all of life. The table is not for the worthy but the loved. Our salvation is a done deal. It was signed, sealed and delivered 2000 years ago “on a hill far away”. It is not about us but about God.

The reason that we do good works and live the way we live is our thank you note to God for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Our lives--the decisions that we make, the things that we do and do not do--are not for our edification but God’s glorification. God created us in Christ Jesus, the writer of Ephesians said, so that we can do the good works that God prepared for us to do before we were even born.

Between now and Easter Sunday, let us dedicate ourselves to doing all the good that we can, not so that we may win awards or receive honor or even to be remembered but so that God can be glorified.

Amen.