

Reformation Sunday 2022, Romans 3:19-28

Shortly after arriving at our first call in Malinta, Ohio, Liz and I went out for dinner at a place called the Ellery Supper Club, which was on the same ground as the Ellery Elevator. After dinner I went up to pay the bill and being low on cash, I pulled out the ole trusty credit card. The cashier reached under the counter and pulled the credit card imprint machine. (Even in 1998 it had been a while since I had seen one of those). She put the card on the machine, placed the slip-on top of the card, adjusted the numbers on the machine and then pulled the arm of the roller so that it went over the card.... rack-rack.

That is a sound we do not hear that often. That rack-rack sound lets you know that you have rung up a debt.

That is a lot different now with the machines we have now. I can swipe the card in the machine, and no one notices, I do not even notice, and at times I do not even notice...until I get the bill.

If truth be known, we hardly notice the debt we ring up with God. The reason?? Maybe we have become so desensitized to sin in our lives. What if every time I sinned, we heard that rack-rack sound go off every time we sinned.

-We snap and yell at our spouse or kids - rack-rack.

-Take the Lord's name in vain - rack-rack.

-cut somebody off in traffic - rack-rack.

-Take advantage of a selfish opportunity and ignore a good opportunity sitting right before us - rack-rack.

-and worse of all, fall asleep during this sermon - rack-rack-rack-rack-rack-rack!

Actually, God has equipped us with a rack-rack system every time we sin. It's called our conscience. It can be annoying and obnoxious every time we sin. It is the steady sound of guilt, shame, and fear.

It is something that we like to turn off or mute. We do this with rationalization, self-justification, finding loopholes, redefining sin, Denial - Or we try to just let it go.

Here is the thing, God will let it go. Saint Paul states it so will in the 3rd chapter of Romans this morning.

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world is held accountable to God." Romans 3:19.

God will not let you go. He has given us His Word to sound the alarm. In the second lesson for today, St Paul, sounds the alarm that every prophet had sounded through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

“No one is righteous, no, not one. All have turned aside.” Rack-Rack!

Martin Luther was one of those people 505 years ago who could not silence the alarm in his conscience.

He tried to silence the rack-rack in his conscience. He used the techniques provided by the Church of his day. No matter how long he prayed, no matter how long he confessed, no matter how many acts of penance he performed, his conscience was still bothered. He was tormented by the fact that he could not pay back the debt that he felt he owed God for his sins. He felt he could never do enough to satisfy angry God.

When I make a charge at the Ellery Supper Club or any place on my credit card, I know what I owe and pay it off. If I make a partial payment, I get charged interest to the delight of the credit card company, but I know what I owe. But then the problem with sin against God’s law, as Luther would discover, is how do you calculate the cost of sin we commit with God. What is the cost we owe to make it right with God?

-If I steal, do I return four times what it worth to satisfy the debt?

-If I cut someone off in traffic, do I pay the debt by waving to the next five drivers who pass by.

-If yell at my spouse or child, do I make that up by being kind to them for the next month?

-If you fall asleep during this sermon, do you spend the next year in Bible Study every day for 3 hours?

Just what is the cost? 5, 10, 100, 1,000, 10,000, 1,000,000?

Luther could find no peace with God through the management systems that church had set up. Which is the way the law of God works. Romans 3:19-20. “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law, rather the law we become the conscious of sin.”

So, keeping the law is not the way to settle our debt of sin with God and turn off the rack-rack in our heads. So, what is?

Paul answers that for us. He writes, “but now,” Oh, what sweet, sweet words those are. “But now” This is great turning point in this great letter to the Romans. “now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.” All attempts to try to pay the debt through good works are useless.

“For all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God are justified by His grace as a gift.”
through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ his Son.”

This was the great breakthrough for Martin Luther, and It is our breakthrough too. Luther writes, “I concluded that life had to be derived through faith, not by works as I had thought.

Then the entire Holy Scriptures came clear to me, and heaven was open to me. I felt I had been completely reborn, and paradise was open to me.”

God’s way of dealing with the debt we owe is not through some clever payment scheme after another. The way to deal with our debt to Him is for Him to pay it off for us through the incarnation of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ and His holy and blessed suffering and death on the cross for our sake.

On the cross we see the great-great-great price of our sins and its cost and the great-great debt we have before God. But as high as that price is and as deep as that debt is, the Cross of Christ has paid it all, in full.

It is through faith in Christ Jesus and in no other way, that the noisy rack-rack-rack of our sin will be silenced by the sound of:

+ Crucify HIM.....

+ By the sound of the hammer striking the nails as Christ is Crucified to the cross.

+ By the voice of Christ, “forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

+ By the sound of total abandonment, “MY God, God...”

+ By the sound of the grasping voice of “It is finished.”

+ By the sound of confidence of “Into your hands I commit my Spirit.

+ By the silence of death.

+ and the rolling the stone to close the tomb.....

We cannot stop here because there is one more sound and it is the sound of Victory, “Alleluia, Christ has risen. He has risen indeed!”

And the sound of the preaching of the Gospel, “therefore since we have been justified by faith, we peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:5!

And this is precisely what Jesus was talking about in our Gospel for this day. “ If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

Free of the rack-rack of the guilty conscience....

Free of constantly chasing after the peace that is out of your reach....

Free of denial and bargaining and rationalization and justify and redefining sin.

Free to confess when we have gone astray and be absolved for Christ’s sake.

Free to live God’s way - in joy and peace and in love of God and in Love of neighbor. Amen.