

Justification

Romans 8:30c

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This morning we're all together and you'd like to think that that's the way it would be forever, but it really isn't, loved ones. And there will come a time when we will be divided very definitely into two groups. And indeed, we really are divided now into two groups even though we all appear to be together. The most loving man who ever lived made that very plain. He said when the son of man comes in his glory and all his holy angels with him, then there will be gathered before him all the nations and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will say to those at his right hand, "Come blessed of my father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And to those at his left hand, "Depart from me you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

I think it's just good sense and realistic to see that there will be a division, loved ones. The amazing fact, of course, that you and I have been discussing these past few weeks is that God foreknows who of us will be in which group. He foreknows who of us here will be in which group. He foreknows who of us will burn forever against each other in our own lusts and hatreds and who of us will live together in continual peace and harmony forever. God foreknows that. You remember we shared that he foreknows it. He does not put us into those groups. He does not make you the kind of person that can only burn forever against your friends in hatred and anger. He does not make you the kind of person that can only live in love and peace and harmony forever. God does not put us in one group or another. He foreknows which group we will be in.

He himself has made us with free wills so that we can choose which group we want to be in. But he is able to read us. He's able to read us. And he can look at us, even the moment that he conceived us, he can look at us and he can foresee with a mind that is far greater than any computer. He can foresee the numerous contingent decisions that we will make throughout our lifetime and that will result in us being in one group or another. And so God foreknows. The amazing thing is, he foreknew what Hitler was going to do to the Jews and yet he refused to prevent him. Because the one life that he sees is worth preserving is the life of a free relationship of free will agents who love each other. And so the Father has endured, loved ones, all kinds of dreadful things that he has foreseen we would do because he's determined to preserve the ideal of a family of free will agents who love each other because they want to, not because they have to.

So even today, God foreknows what you're going to do this afternoon. And even though you may be going to hurt a person that he loves deeply, and that he has given his own son's life for, God refuses to prevent you doing it because he is committed to the principle of free will, and of at last producing some agents or people who have free will who want to love him. It's incredible, loved ones, the things that God has put up with from us men and women because he has that ideal in his mind. I just remind you of the impossible situation, if I put Irish machine gunners around the auditorium and said, "Okay, we're all going to love each other. Nobody can get out. You're all going to have to love each other." Well, there's no hope. There's just no hope. You cannot compel people to love each other. You cannot force people to be loving towards each other, that's something they have to want to do.

And that's why, loved ones, God made that the whole aim of creating us. He enjoys the love of his

own son, and he wants as many of us who want to, to join him in that trinity family, and to love him and his son, and to live in peace and harmony and understanding and achievement with him forever. And so God has given us the free will, so that we can do that, or not. That's why he offered to us the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit contains his own life, and anyone who receives the Holy Spirit immediately begins to find themselves becoming like Jesus. And, of course, the Father is looking for all those of us who begin to be more and more like Jesus because those are the people who will live forever with him in harmony and peace. And the rest of us will go into some kind of experience such as Sartre described in his play "No Exit".

Now, loved ones, that's the Father's plan. And God foreknows which way we will turn and he foreknows who of us will accept and who of us will reject. Now you may say, "Well, if he knows it, can we not know it?" But loved ones, we have miserable finite little minds, we cannot get into his infinite mind and foreknow all that he foreknows. You know you have trouble foreknowing what your daughter or your son is going to do. We have trouble foreseeing what the examiner is going to do with the examination finals. We have trouble foreknowing little things. We cannot foreknow what he knows. We cannot get into his infinite mind and see what he sees.

But there is one way, you remember we talked about: Everybody that God foresees will receive his Holy Spirit. He begins to design their life in a way that will conform them to Jesus' image. And he begins to do different works in their lives to make them like his Son. So do you see, if one of those works was being done in you now, you could tell something about which way you were heading? In other words, if there are two ways you can go and one of them is into the family of God and there are certain works that God does in people who are choosing that way, then, if one of those works are being done in you, you can have some kind of hope that you are moving in that direction.

Remember I shared with you last day that if we were going to try to foresee which of you were going to fly to New York at five this afternoon. Well, if at four o'clock, all of us but one was still sitting at home drinking coffee, but one of us was on the bus going to the airport, there'd be more a chance that that one would be the one that was flying to New York. Because he or she would be at one stage on the way they'd be moving towards life and some others would be moving towards death.

Now that's what we shared last day, that you cannot see the infinite mind of God. You cannot see what he sees for the future of your life, but you can tell which way you're heading at the moment. In fact, you remember, if you'd like to look at the verse, it's just so important that maybe we should, Deuteronomy 30:19. It's one of those strong verses that reinforces clearly that God has given us free wills. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live."

It is possible to tell whether you're choosing life now or not. It is really. There are some works that God does in those who are choosing life and you can examine if any of those works are being done in you and you can tell whether you are choosing life or not. Now maybe we should look back at the works, loved ones. It's in Romans 8:30. You remember Romans 8:29 just summarizes what we've said up to the moment, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." Now how can you tell if you are foreknown as one who is predestined? Romans 8:30, "And those whom he predestined he also called." So if God has looked into your life and he sees that you are willing to receive his Holy Spirit, he predestines or pre-designs you to be conformed to his Son's image. Now how can you tell if you are foreknown in that way? How can you tell if you have chosen that or not? Well, you'll be

called, that's the first thing.

You remember we said last day that everybody is called. Those of us who are going to live with God forever and those who are going to reject living with him forever, we're all called, everybody is called. He causes his rain to rain on the just and the unjust. He causes his calling to come to all people. Those whom he has foreknown will receive his Spirit and those whom he has foreknown will reject his Spirit. The call comes to everybody so really to tell if you are one of those who have been predestined or foreknown as predestined to be like his Son, you have to ask not only are you called, but have you responded to the call? That's really what you should think of.

I could outline some of the call. All of us have probably sensed at one time or another that unguided evolution, or chance, or explosion, cannot explain the order and design that we see in blood circulation, in the seasons, in the design of the human brain. All of us have probably sensed that at one time or another. Now that's part of the call. That's God saying, "Look, there is somebody outside this universe who is responsible for it." Now what we have to ask ourselves is, how have we responded to that call? Some of us know that, but we've kind of put it on the shelf and leave it there and say, "Well, everybody knows that." And some of us begin to respond to it by saying, "Yeah, and I wonder why that intelligent being put us here?" Now it sounds ridiculous, loved ones, but you can actually tell which way you're heading by the way you've responded to that initial call, really you can. You can tell which way you're heading and which way you'll probably end up by the way you responded to that call.

I remember -- I think I shared with you -- at seminary, one fellow got hold of a comment by some old saint in a book. We were all having trouble with our prayer times. We couldn't get up to pray. And we were devising all kinds of methods to get up to pray without tears. And he read this comment by this old saint in the book, "As Now, So Then." It just hit us, tore away all the hypocrisy and all the pretence. As you are now, you haven't much reason for believing that further on you're going to be very different. It's not determinism, it's just you're choosing. You're choosing what you're going to do today and it's affecting what you're going to do tomorrow. So, loved ones, you can tell partly by your response to that call.

Another part of the call you remember we shared was that most of us have sensed at some time or another, that we are not living life the way we should, and that we can't seem to do anything about it. Most of us have sensed that. That we're not living life the way it was meant to be lived and yet we don't seem able to do anything about it. Now, some of us simply grunt and say, "Well, we're all human beings. We're only humans. We're all doing our best. That's what we've got to do, just keep on doing our best." Some of us respond to that call in that way. And some of us respond to it wondering, "Is this conscience that's making me feel this, is this some kind of message from outer space that I can really live this way?" Now you examine your own heart; which way have you responded to that? You can tell which way you're going by the way you've responded to that feeling that you're not living quite up to par. You can tell which way you're going according to whether you've kind of grunted, "Well, we're all human beings. We must do our best. Live by the golden rule as best you can." Or are you responding saying, "This conscience inside me -- it must be some kind of message from outer space that you can live better than I am living." Now you can tell which is which.

Another part of the call, you remember we said, was that some of us at some time sense that this Jesus -- from the evidence that we've seen, from his miracles and his resurrection from the dead, from the good documentary evidence we have behind the history of the New Testament -- we sense this

Jesus probably is the son of the Creator of the universe. He probably is. Now some of us decide, "Well, that's very nice, he probably is. And maybe he did let something evil in me be destroyed with him on the cross. Well, that's very good of him. That's certainly a man laying down his life for his friends. That's good." And we kind of lay it aside and we say, "Well, yeah, that's good." And we admire him, but we put it on the shelf.

Others of us say, "What did he really do on the cross? If he didn't die just as a political criminal, then did he allow some evil inside me to be destroyed with himself? And if he did, what does it mean for my own life?" Loved ones, you can tell which way you're going, you know you can. I bet you if I talked with you even, I could probably tell which way you've responded to that call so far, even allowing for all the ridiculous pretence we can put on, we sophisticates. But you need to look, which way am I responding to that?

You remember another part of the call that we shared was, many of us sense that unless we experience some supernatural power of some kind, something even like the Holy Spirit, we're just not going to be able to deal with the terrible sense of insignificance we have in our lives, the terrible sense of unhappiness we have, the terrible sense of frustration we have. We sense unless we have some supernatural power beyond ourselves, we will not be able to deal with these things.

And some of us, of course, reject that idea completely. Some of us decide, "I'm not going to submit my life to this Holy Spirit. I'm going to opt to kind of overcome these things myself." And so by our own power and our own willpower, we try to make ourselves significant. We try to make ourselves secure. We try to make ourselves happy. So, loved ones, really, you can tell which way you're heading by the way you've responded so far to the call.

Now here's the amazing thing. Those of us who believe that Jesus did not die for himself, but that he actually allowed the old carnal selfish will that we've been struggling with for years and that has been spoiling our life for years, but that he actually allowed that to be destroyed with him -- those of us who side with Jesus against ourselves and who submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit to conform us to his image, we experience a sense of being justified. That's right. We know we're not right yet, we know we still have not everything together inside, we know we have made a mess of life, we know we aren't up to much, but there's inside us a clear witness, "I'm doing nothing to stop God through the Holy Spirit making real the destruction of this evil within me that took place on Calvary." There's a conviction inside us that that's our situation. And there's a sense we have inside that we're justified, really.

We know there's still a heart of darkness inside us. We know there's a terrible selfishness that is trying to destroy us and destroy everybody else. We know we're not perfect saints, but we have a clear conviction that we know that the only way we're going to get over this is to accept that that was destroyed with Jesus on Calvary 1900 years ago, and that the Holy Spirit is able to so work in us that he can make this real in us today. And so we have a clear sense that we're accepting the remedy that the Creator has provided. In other words, we know that we're allowing him to bring a personal flood of destruction into our rebel hearts and so that somehow he is justified in letting us continue to live in this world. Because he has, in fact, destroyed the evil in us in Jesus. And so we sense in some way that he is justified in allowing us to live. And we begin to sense that we are justified in being alive. And we're justified in continuing to live in his world, simply because we sense we're not doing anything to stop him bringing about the remedy that he has provided. That is, the destruction of that old self and all that desire for our own way and our own rights in Jesus.

And that's, of course, what Romans 8:30 says. Those who are called, who have responded to the call, they find themselves justified. That is, they begin to feel at home with the Maker of the universe. They begin to sense, he loves me. He's accepted me. I'm not perfect. I'm not pure and saintly as he is going to make me, but he has put me into his son, Jesus, and has destroyed me there. And as far as he is concerned he feels justified in therefore letting me to continue to live in this world among my friends. And so, thank you, Lord. And there's a sense of feeling that we're justified, loved ones. We just feel we've been made right with God. We've been put right with our Maker.

Now those of us who have rejected that, have a completely different experience. Those of us who have said, "Maybe something did happen in Jesus and Calvary. I don't know what it was, I don't understand it. When those fellows talk about it, I can't get my hands around it at all. Maybe he did do something. Maybe he is a great person. Maybe he's even the son of God, but I have a lot of feelings of fear and insecurity in my life and I'm going to overcome this myself. By hook or by crook, I'm going to overcome this insecurity that I have on my own. I'm going to destroy this insignificance that I feel. I'm going to overcome it on my own. I'm going to make myself happy."

And, loved ones, somehow we sense we're not being what God made us to be. We're not doing what he wants us to do. We're not accepted by him. We're not fulfilling the purpose for which we were made. And therefore, we have a terrible sense of having somehow to justify ourselves. Because whether we really believe we're going to hell or not, we are made by a Creator who has committed himself to destroying everybody who rejects him. And that is built deep into our beings. And we may hardly even believe the Bible, but we still sense that somehow we're not justified in being here. And we have a terrible sense of insecurity and a dreadful sense of insignificance. And we feel we ought not to have a place here on the world's surface. And many of us will even testify to that. We'll say, "I don't feel I have any right to be here." And we will spend our lives trying to justify ourselves.

We'll be like Pilate. We'll want to justify ourselves to our superiors by doing what they want us to do. We'll be trying to justify ourselves to public opinion by trying to do what it wants us to do. We'll be trying to justify ourselves to our parents by being the kind of people that they want us to be. We'll be trying to justify ourselves to our peers by trying to compete successfully with them and compete even successfully against our own standards for ourselves. We'll try to justify ourselves to our parents, to our husbands, to our wives. We'll try to be the wives who make "mountain grown coffee" [from a TV commercial]. We'll try to be the husbands who are earning all the money that the wife needs. We'll spend our lives trying to justify ourselves because we won't accept the justification that God has given us in his son, Jesus.

Now, loved ones, it doesn't take a deep, deep person to see which way you're going. Those of us who accept what God has said about us, and accept that we have to be destroyed in his son, Jesus, as far as our old selfish will is concerned, those of us are justified in his eyes and we feel justified. Those of us who refuse that and determine to try to overcome the insignificance, and the insecurity, and the unhappiness on our own, end up trying to justify the unjustifiable. We really do. Our lives end up in a continual series of attempts to justify what cannot be justified. We do something wrong. We know it's wrong. The boss tells us off. We try to justify to him what can't be justified. We're always trying to justify what we are because we're not what we should be.

Now, loved ones, where do you stand, really? Which way are you heading? We agreed a couple of weeks ago, it was uncanny, almost sinister, to believe that there is a great mind in this universe

that actually foreknows what way you're going to end up and what way I'm going to end up. But, you remember, we decided we can't deal with that, that's in infinity. All we can deal with is this finite world. But we can tell which way we're turning today. Loved ones, you can. You can. You care more for public opinion, like Pilate, than you care for God's opinion of you. You care more for what men will say to you than for what God says about you? And you know that he has provided a way. But you know it off by heart so I'm not going to repeat it to you, but I just push you on this. Are you responding to the call, or are you continuing to try to justify yourself?

Let's pray. Dear Father, you know that we have been brought up in a society where we have been taught to try to justify ourselves by getting good grades or getting on to the school team. Lord, you know that all the commercials on television, they're rating us with a need to justify ourselves to our husbands and our wives. Lord, you know how Satan seems to have divided us against each other, instead of uniting us. You know, our Father, how many of us can hardly sleep at night because we're worried about what somebody will think of us the next day. And, Lord, we know that this is not your plan for us. We know, our Father, that what you want to do is get us to stop covering up what we are. Stop pretending that we are good. Stop pretending that we are what we aren't, and just accept that there is a miserable, selfish heart of darkness in us that you saw could only be destroyed in Jesus, your son, on Calvary. And that you have, in fact, done that. And all you're asking us to do this morning is believe that and allow your dear Holy Spirit to start showing us how that can be real in our lives.

Oh, Holy Spirit, we see that all we have to do is speak to you and ask you to start revealing to us in what way God has destroyed all that is wrong in us already and has no wish to destroy us any longer. And, as far as he is concerned, he's justified in allowing us to live. And we are justified in his sight. We are put right with him. Lord, I pray for each dear one here in the auditorium and on this communion Sunday, Lord, I pray that some brother or sister will take a definite step this morning that they can confirm at communion this evening and have done with all the self-justification. Lord, we would pray for each other as just human beings. We pray that you'd help each of us to see how to step into justification and step on the way to life and away from death. We ask this in Jesus' name. And now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and throughout these coming years and forevermore. Amen