

Be What You Are

Romans 10:8

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, will you take a Bible and begin together with Romans 10:8: "But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)."

"But what does it say?" Well, what does what say? You find the answer if you go back a few verses to verse six: "But the righteousness based on faith says" -- and so, it is: "What does the righteousness based on faith say?" I don't know about you, but when I hear the word "righteousness" I tend to think of self-righteous people, and maybe that is a difficult word for us to understand properly in the twentieth century. Maybe a better word is "rightness", because that really is what it is. The rightness of faith. What does the rightness based on faith say?

I'd ask you, do you have a feeling of rightness about your own life? I think it would be fair to say that many of us feel good about our lives. We feel good about our jobs, we feel good about our friendships and our relationships and we feel good about our futures. Many of us here this morning would say, "Yes, I do have a sense of rightness about my life."

I think it is true to say, too, that many of us here would feel right about some parts and not others. So we would answer, "Yes, I do have a sense of rightness about my job. At the moment I feel good about it. There are certain relationships with my colleagues at work that if I think about them a little, I don't feel so good about! There are certain attitudes that they have to me and certain attitudes that I have to them that don't exactly give me a sense of comfort. In fact, I have some discomfort when I think of it. And certainly, I don't feel that they are what they should be. But there are many other parts of my life that I do feel right about."

"There are certain things that I can't let my mind think about. I do lose that sense of rightness when my mind thinks about the future and the economy and the effects that the social tensions of society could have on my life. There are certain things that I do right, and I feel good about them. But there are certainly some things that I do not do right, and there are certain attitudes, secret attitudes of self-gratification and selfishness that I don't feel good about. There are certain words of criticism and even sarcasm that I use to my friends and relatives that I am sorry about afterwards. I don't feel right about them."

Many of us would answer that way, wouldn't we? And some of us, of course, say, "But I want that rightness -- I do want it." And that is interesting. That is one thing that we all have in common here. All of us have kind of a built-in gyro-compass or a built-in sense that we should feel right about things.

However wrong everything is, we feel we are meant to feel right about things. We are meant to have a sense of rightness in life. There is some power inside us that keeps us trying to make things right.

So, many of us involve ourselves in all kinds of self-improvement efforts. We decide to lose weight, or we decide to gain weight, or we decide to eat better food, or we try to sleep more

regularly so that we will be less irritable with the people at work. Or we decide we will try to improve our communication skills so that we will be able to communicate with our friends and our colleagues. I think it's true that all of us are anxious to get things right in our lives.

Some of us feel that the reasons for our sense of discomfort, are the attitudes that come from failing to live up to certain standards that religion has set. So we decide we will go to a self-improvement course in which we try to discipline ourselves to live up to the standards of the Sermon on the Mount, or of the ancient philosophers.

Others of us go the other way completely. We claim to be existential and we join the existential writers and we say, "Let's face it, human nature is cruddy! We are self-assertive monsters. We are always involved in self-defense. We are always involved in lust and hate and resentment and criticism. We are always involved in paranoia or in persecuting somebody else. That's human nature. Let's just be what we are."

"We are miserable wretches. Let's be that way. And maybe some time at some point in the universe, the whole three-and-a-half billion of us will be howling like mad at each other, and at that point we will reach some point of euphoria or incredible peace that we never imagined before. Let's just let it all hang out and express what we think."

So, some of us have decided that we will go with the attitudes of resentment and criticism and self-defensiveness and self-assertiveness and anger and irritability that we have. That's the way we are. We will just be that way, and maybe then we will feel right about it. At least it will take away the tension of feeling that we are not right.

Loved ones, we human beings were meant to feel good about our lives. We were meant to feel good about our jobs. We were meant to feel good about our relationships. We were meant to feel good about our futures. We were meant to feel a sense of rightness about our lives.

And the sense of rightness that is based on faith says, "Don't think you are ever going to come to a sense of everything being right in your life by living up to all the ideals that you find in the self-improvement courses or in the religions. You will never do it. You will never feel right or come to a sense of rightness by succeeding in living up to all the ideals you think you should live up to."

Now here is the way that it is put. We talked about it a few weeks ago. Romans 10:6: "But the rightness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down)."

Your Creator says to you, "Look, you will never get a sense of rightness in your life by thinking that somehow you are going to live high enough, that you are going to ascend into heaven by a very good behavior and by successfully disciplining all your wrong passions, that by managing to do that you will get a sense of rightness. You will never do it. All the religions in the world are based on that except mine -- the idea that somehow you will live good enough in order to create a sense of rightness in yourself. It will never happen."

You see, verse seven says the opposite thing. "Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." Don't pretend that you haven't a conscience, and that somehow you will get a sense of rightness by just being as miserable and wretched as your worst feelings want

you to be. Don't sink into the position of the existential writers who think they are being realistic when they choose the worst of human nature and base their plays on that.

Don't think that by being that way you are going to find a sense of right, or that somehow we will create the Christ-life or the sense of rightness in ourselves. The rightness that is based on faith and that we are meant to have says, "You will never come to a sense of rightness in your life either by idealistic striving or by amoral passivity." This verse says, "Well, what does the rightness based on faith say?" Well, it says, "Be what you are."

What are you? Well, we are infinitesimally small creatures who come into this world in unbelievable weakness and vulnerability. We do. Human babies must be the most vulnerable animals in the whole universe. We come into this world in incredible weakness and vulnerability, and after 70 years we go out of it in even more weakness and vulnerability. And in between we are utterly dependent on the One who sent us here, and the One who will receive us when we leave. But despite our puny coming and our pathetic going, in between the coming and the going, we act as if we control the whole universe, and could control it, and ought to control it for our own benefit.

The rightness based on faith says, "That's not right. If you can't control either your coming or your going, then it is obvious that you are utterly dependent on the One who sent you here and the One who will receive you when you leave. So everything in between is surely equally dependent upon Him, and the only right thing to do is to acknowledge that. Acknowledge that you are utterly dependent on this God for your relationship with your colleagues, for your status with your peers, for your success in your job. For the security of your future, for your own personal happiness.

Surely the wise thing is to acknowledge that you are dependent on the Creator that made you for all these things. And you ought to simply live trusting him and depending on him to provide these things for you."

Of course a number of us would say, "Well, that is what I have tried to do. I have tried to put my faith in my God for my future so that I would have no worries and anxieties. I have tried to put my faith in my God for my status and my position with my peers so that I wouldn't get resentful when they started to criticize me. I have tried to put my faith in my God for my own security. But there are forces inside my personality that seem to be connected by some kind of umbilical cord, some mystical cord or chain to the vagaries of other people and to the inconsistent events that happen to me."

"Somehow these forces inside my personality are controlled like puppets on strings by the external environment in which I live, by the external people that I deal with, by the fears of the future. I can't control those forces."

How can we? How can we put our faith in God for all the things in our lives and have a sense of rightness that comes because it is simply right? We are dependent on him for everything that we have. How can we do that when our own personality seems to relish putting its faith in people and things and events?

There is only one way. Your personality has to be changed. If it isn't, you have no hope, because you and I have tried already to control it. But it has been changed, and remade by your Creator. Now, would you look at some verses with me that show that is true? 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore,

if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”

Stop! Don't go to sleep, and don't leave me! Two-thirds of us are saying, "What a nice metaphor! That is true for somebody who is trying to imitate Jesus' life. I can see that. If somebody is trying to imitate Jesus' life by the power of their own wills, then if they are in Christ, they are a new creation. They are going to try hard, and they are going to become like him, and they are going to be a new creation.”

That's not it! It's every one of us! Every one of us here has been put into Christ and we are a new creation. Now look at 2 Corinthians 5:14: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.” You, whether you are following Jesus at this moment or not, whether you are even trying to follow him, have died with Christ. That is what the verse says.

You can't eliminate Hitler from that verse. You can't say Christ died for all except Hitler or all except me, therefore all except Hitler or all except me have died. This word says God put all of us into his Son and remade all of us. And you have a personality inside you that is ready to thrive on trusting its God. Outwardly you have an old personality that has eyes that are darting out to see other people's approval. Outwardly you have a mind that is used to depending on the bank balance for security. Inwardly you have a new personality, a new creation that God has given you in Jesus and that is ready to come forth at this very moment.

Now, you see what this verse says that we are studying, Romans 10:8: "But what does it say?" (That is, the righteousness that is based on faith in God, or the sense of rightness that you get from trust in God.) "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach).”

Now the Greek word there for "word" is not "logos". "Logos" means the description of faith, but this Greek word is "rhema", and it means God speaking and creating faith. You remember at the beginning of Genesis God said, Let there be light, and there was light. That is "rhema". That is the word of God that causes things or pours things out or makes reality real.

Now, do you see what God is saying? The ability to create faith is inside all of you at this moment. The word for "near" is actually "engkus" which means "within". In other words, there is within you all the necessary equipment and the new personality to immediately launch into a new life this very day. There is a personality inside you that has been remade in Jesus' image, that is in Jesus, and just as he was able to trust his Father in the midst of all the shouting and all the anger of the Roman soldiers, so his personality is inside you and is able to do the same, however many times people criticize you.

That personality is at this moment on your lips and in your heart. On your lips -- you need to act forth what is in you. In your heart -- you need to believe that it has happened to you. And immediately the power of that new personality begins to bring you into a right relationship of trust with your Creator and will begin to express rightness throughout your whole life.

Let it come out. The way you let it come out is by doing two things. On your lips -- speaking it forth and acting it forth; no longer saying, "Well, if I had been crucified with Christ I'd be a new creation. Yes, if that were true I'd be, and then I'd be able to trust God and I wouldn't have to worry what people are saying.”

Stop that! The truth is that you have been crucified with Christ. There is a new personality inside you that has been remade by God in Jesus, and all you have to do is let it come forth.

Then, believe in your heart. Believe the reality that Christ died for all of us and therefore all of us have died.

So in a sense, loved ones, you can choose. That is really what I want to get over to you in these Sundays. You actually do have the power to choose. It is a bluff when we say we can't. I agree with you, you can't! The old personality that you have at the moment is enslaved to society, but you have experienced the same thing that I have. You have been changed in Jesus, and you can let that life flood through your whole life if you so choose.

Just one more thing. When I switch on a light switch, do you think I switch it and then some guy behind the wall calls Northern States Power Electric Company, and says, "Let's get the old river flowing, let's get the hydro-electric power going," or that he says to some guy beside him, "Throw some more coal on the fire; there is a guy down in Garden Court who wants some electricity." No, you don't. The power is right there behind the switch. All you have to do is switch that switch, and the power comes through all the wires and up into the light.

It's the same with you. That's why this verse says the word of faith is on your lips and in your heart. It is right round you. You are in the middle of victory at this moment. All you have to do is speak and act it forth and believe it in your own heart.

I know it's unbelievable, but it is the truth. You can start living as you were meant to live this very moment. You can have a sense of righteousness with your God this very moment. A sense of rightness that will go through all your life, because there is only one right way to live, and that is depending and trusting the dear Father who has sent you here, and enjoying Him. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we see that we can choose this very moment to experience the miracle that you wrought upon our old personalities in Jesus, or we can choose to continue to live these cruddy lives, pretending that the personality that we now have, is the only one available. Lord, we see that we are just liars, deceiving ourselves and pretending because we see that you have said plainly, that Christ has died for all of us, therefore all of us have died and therefore we ourselves have been remade and that new personality is standing by, ready to take over if we will give the word. Thank you Lord. Thank you for such a miracle and thank you that it is up to us to choose You. Choose whom you will serve, whether it be Baal let him be God, or God, let him be God. [I Kings 18:21] Lord, we see that it is our choice, we would pray for each other that we will make it firmly today and come into rightness at last where we feel good about lives and we feel right about being here on earth and about eventually leaving it. 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 ever more. Amen.