

Date: August 9, 2026 (11th Sunday after Pentecost, series A) (Proper 14)

Title: “Doing—or Believing?”

Text: Romans 10:5-17

Moses writes this about the righteousness that is based on the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.” [Leviticus 18:5] ⁶ But the righteousness that is based on faith says: “Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”” (that is, to bring Christ down) [Deuteronomy 30:12] ⁷ “or “Who will descend into the deep?”” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) [Psalm 107:26]. ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart” [Deuteronomy 30:14]—that is, the message of faith that we proclaim: ⁹ if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame.” [Isaiah 28:16] ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Greek – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him. ¹³ For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” [Joel 2:32]

¹⁴ But how can they call on someone they have not believed in? And how can they believe in someone they have not heard of? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

¹⁵ And how can someone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” [Isaiah 52:7]

¹⁶ But not all the Israelites have obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” [Isaiah 53:1] ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

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Brenda and I enjoyed a really great “getaway” to Whistler, a couple of weeks ago. The best part was that it was a pretty complete “break” from everything I find myself “doing” (most of the time) here at home. Usually, the summer itself is kind of a break from many of the normal tasks and routines of ministry. But this year (as you know) we’ve had the privilege of welcoming two new colleagues into our midst—Jenn in the church office, and Vicar Nick alongside me. Welcoming the two of them has made my life here at church quite a bit busier than usual. And of course, on top of that, there’s the usual list of “summer projects” in our house and yard as well.

So, the chance to spend three days in Whistler with longtime friends we’ve known for more than 30 years, was a *super* break. That was true even though we still *did* things. We went hiking, walking, running, shopping, and exploring. But the key thing was, we did what we *wanted* to do!—what we *felt* like doing—what we *enjoyed* doing. There was no sense of compulsion in any of it—we were free to do, or not do, whatever we wanted. That was what made those few days such a good *holiday*.

Paul’s words to the Christians in Rome (which we heard in our second reading) remind us what it is that turns *all* of our days into “holidays”—*holy* days, rest days, days of freedom and peace and renewal. The way Paul explains it, the beautiful new life that Jesus invites us to join him in, includes both positive and negative elements—the absence of things that wear us down, and the presence of other things that lift us up. Following Jesus, in other words, means *not* being burdened, weighed-down, or tuckered-out by a long list of things we *have* to do. Instead, Jesus sets us *free* to experience relief and joy and pleasure, as new and marvellous gifts of God.

What Paul starts with, here in this reading, is the absence of all of that working, and striving, and stressing that God’s Law demands. **“This is what Moses writes about the righteousness that**

is based on the Law,” Paul says: “**“The person who *does* these things will live by them.”**” (Rom 10:3) That’s the principle that all of us *naturally* live by, unless and until some “outside voice” (or messenger) comes along to break that pattern. Otherwise, it’s all about our doing!—whether we focus more on what Paul calls our “**ascending**” or what he refers to as our “**descending**.” What he’s getting at, are two opposite-but-matching ways of trying to save ourselves. One is by “**ascending into heaven, to bring Christ down**.” Picture that, maybe, like thinking we have to “do our best” to raise ourselves up to heaven, and grab hold of our own salvation “up there” by doing all sorts of good deeds. (6) The other kind of “doing” Paul envisions is the opposite—“**descending into the deep**”—in his terms, “**to bring Christ up from the dead**.” The idea there, I think, is that we ourselves need to “defeat the powers of evil” by our own miraculous efforts. (7)

Maybe both of those examples seem kind of silly to us today. I’ve never met anyone who actually tried to do either of them! But Paul’s point has less to do with the details of the particular kind of striving you and I pour ourselves into, as the fact that we pour ourselves into them. The good news is that we *don’t* actually have to do any of that striving at all!

- Following *these* rules won’t work; following *those* rules won’t work.
 - Hauling ourselves *up* doesn’t do it; muscling ourselves *down* doesn’t do it.
- Nothing* does it, actually!—that’s what Paul is getting at. The only way to satisfy God (according to this principle that Paul calls “the Law”) would be for us to “do” *whatever* those good things are that we’re focused on, *so well* that we “**live by them**”—24/7/365. (5)

To be clear, this *doesn’t* mean that it’s *wrong* to be good! Doing good *is* good—especially when the option on the other side is doing bad. But what Paul is getting at here is *not* a choice between doing good or doing bad, but rather the bigger choice between “*doing*” anything at all to please God, and *trusting* that God himself will do whatever he thinks has to be done, in order to save us. No matter *what* we think we need to do, the underlying problem Paul is pointing out is that we *inevitably* end up relying on the fact that it is *us* who is *doing* it!

So, *instead* of “**doing**,” what Paul points us toward instead, is “**believing**.” What “**the righteousness that is based on faith**” tells us is *not* “**the person who does these things will live by them**.” Instead, “**the righteousness that is based on faith**” tells us, “it’s all about Jesus.” (6)

Believing in Jesus, you see, is the opposite of “**doing**.” Believing in Jesus gives *us* a holiday, so that *we* are off-duty... taking a break... taking a breather... enjoying a really good rest. We can relax, and take it easy for a while—why?—because Jesus is in charge. Not us.

That, Paul says, is the “**confession**” that saves us. “**If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**” (10) Being ‘**lord**’ (in this context) means being the boss, taking responsibility, taking care of business. So, confessing that “**Jesus is Lord**” gets you and me out of the need to please or satisfy God on our own.

- We don’t have go searching for our Saviour in heaven (“Please come down and help us!”).
- Nor do we have to go looking for our Saviour down there in the grave (“Wakey-wakey, Jesus, we need you!”).

No—Paul says—the “**word**” (or the “**message**”) that saves us is “***near to us***” already. (8) It’s already here, right beside us, close at hand. No “**doing**” or striving or stressing or straining is required. As long as we *say*, “**Jesus, you are the Lord—you are in charge!**”—*and* “**believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead**”—that’s it! We’re “**saved**”... we’re “**righteous**”... we’re “**justified**.” (9, 6, 10)

Each of those words Paul uses there has a narrow and more technical meaning too. But what they all tell us, together, is that we can rest.

- “It’s OK—you’re *on holidays* now,” the gospel tells us.
- “Every single one of your days is *holy* already, to God and to you, because Jesus has already done everything that is necessary, for you.
- “There is nothing at all anymore that *you* have to do—when it comes to your salvation. Jesus has already died to pay for your sins. He has already risen from the grave to open your grave.
- “All *you* need to ‘do’ is *hear* this great good news, and *take* it to heart, and you’re done!”

A few years ago, I had a very moving experience while I was visiting a woman who was dying (over here at Trillium Hospice). It was clear to both of us that her time was short; there was no time to waste.

“Listen,” I said. “You know all the things you’ve done wrong, over the course of your life. You know all the ways you’ve let down God and others. That’s why Jesus took care of everything *for you*. He died on Good Friday to pay for *all* of your sins. And he rose on Easter Sunday so that you too can rise from your grave.”

“That’s it?” she asked.

“That’s it!” I told her.

“OK,” she said.

And not long after that, she died.

The reason we gave that dear woman a Christian burial is because it was clear that afternoon, at the very end of her life, that she *did* **“confess with her mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in her heart that God raised him from the dead.”** (10) Just as *Paul says the Scripture* says, **“Anyone who believes in him [that is, Jesus] will never be put to shame!”** (11)

So far, though, you and I are not in the hospice. We still have (at least) *some* time and energy left, to do *some* things. We “get it” that we don’t *have to* work all the time—not in life as a whole, nor in our life before God! And yet, we are deeply and genuinely thankful to be able to do *some* things, to show and live-out our faith.

Here in this reading, the *only* thing Paul envisions us **“doing”** is sharing this story of how Jesus brings all of our striving and working to an end. That good news is for everyone, Paul says—it’s like a “statutory holiday” that everyone in the whole world can claim! In Paul’s terms: **“There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all, and richly blesses all who call on him.”** (12) The only catch is that people have to *hear* this, and *understand* it, and *believe* that it’s true for them, in order for it to really “kick in” and *change* things for them. That’s what Paul is getting at in that series of four very logical questions, that we find in the middle of this reading.

- **“How can people call on someone they have not believed in?”** Paul asks.
- **“And how can they believe in someone they have not heard of?”**
- **“And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”**
- **“And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?”** (14)

Again, holidays are great—even more in spiritual terms than in the rest of life. God wants *everyone* to know that what Jesus has already done for us all, is enough—we’re “on *permanent* holidays” as far as our relationship with God is concerned! But that’s precisely why God calls us, and sends us out to talk to others. No, we are not “working” for our own salvation, as we do this.

Jesus has already done everything that is necessary, for us! This is just what we *want* to do—and (as it happens) what God is really happy and pleased to see us doing, too! The faith he himself gives to *us*, is a gift he *also* wants to give to others, *through* us.

Unfortunately, *wanting* to do this still doesn't make it easy. You and I often lose our nerve just as quickly as Peter did in today's Gospel reading, when Jesus called him to "step out of the boat and start walking." Like Peter, maybe we're fine for the first few steps—but then we too "notice the wind" that's maybe starting to blow against us (in the course of that conversation). "Hey," we think; "I'm actually 'over my head' here in this conversation. What do I say *now*? What do I *do*, next?" Like Peter, we too "**start to sink,**" and in our anxiety and panic, we too "**cry out, 'Lord, save me!'**" (30)

Thankfully, Jesus does. We can count on him for that. Again, we don't absolutely *have* to talk to other people about our faith. We're under no obligation to do *anything*, for God to save us! The mission that *he* carries out, here in this world, is always *his* mission, far more than it's ours. *But*—that said—whenever God does invite us to "step out of our comfort-zone" and take a few steps toward somebody else, to encourage them to put their faith too in Jesus—well, there's no way Jesus is ever going to abandon us, or "let us down," at that point. For sure he sees that we too (like Peter) have "**only a little faith.**" (31) But a little faith is more than enough, when the Person we put our faith in is Jesus. None of our failures are ever fatal, when it's Jesus we call out to, to "**save us!**" (30)

I hope all of this helps you to relax, not only when it comes to sharing your faith but also on the even more basic level of *having* faith. The last thing God wants any of us to *do* is burn ourselves out *with* all of our doing. We don't need to pay for our mistakes, or pay off any of our sins. Jesus has done all of that already for us.

So, this righteousness God gives us (based on faith) no longer says, "**How am I ever going to manage to get up into heaven?**"—as if it was *my* job to bring Christ down! Nor does it say, "**How am I ever going to descend into the deep?**"—as if *I* needed to figure out a way to raise the dead. (6)

Instead, "**the word of faith that we proclaim**" to each other and to the world is simply this: "**If you confess with your mouth that 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**" (9)

If we're able to *join* Jesus on his mission of *carrying* that good news out into the world, that's terrific! We don't have to stay on holidays forever, just to keep our faith pure. But the gift of new life "**on the basis of faith**" is always exactly that: a gift. There are never any strings attached; it's always freely given.

So—

- Are you enjoying your holidays—now that there's nothing more you absolutely *have to do* to keep God happy?
- Are you getting a good rest—now that Jesus has already done everything that *needed* to be done, to save us?
- Are you feeling refreshed—now that your Saviour has once again forgiven all your sins, and made you his own?

I hope so! More than that, I pray so. For this is God's will for *all* of us, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thanks be to God! Amen.