**Second Sunday after Pentecost**

**Text:** Roman: 3:21-25a, 27, 28

**Theme:** Fallen Short!

This month Publisher’s Clearing House will award their prize of $5,000 a week for life to a lucky winner. Let’s suppose that Publisher’s Clearing House offers a 100 billion dollar prize to anyone who can swim nonstop to Hawaii—2,599 miles. On the appointed day, six well trained swimmers line up on the beach at San Diego. At the crack of the gun, the six contestants plunge into the surf, heading for Honolulu. After a few minutes all six are out of sight. Six hours into the race the first contestant quits because of cramps in his side. Four hours later a second swimmer stops because of sheer exhaustion. The other four redouble their efforts. Twelve hours pass, then 15, then 18. At the 20 hour mark, 3 others finally give up. Meanwhile, one determined man swims on. Eventually he too must quit, but only after an amazing 48 hours in the water.

Will he win the 100 billion dollars? No, because he didn’t swim to Hawaii. The prize was not offered to the one who swam the farthest, but only to the one who made it all the way to Honolulu. Since no one made it, no one wins the prize. All six swimmers tried valiantly, and some did better than others, but all of them ultimately failed. They all fell short of the goal. No prize was given because there was no winner.

Paul reminds us that we all fail! We cannot win! “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**”

What is Paul saying here? All of us are in the same leaky boat. “There is no distinction,” he says, “**for all have sinned”** (3:22-23). Plan as we will and try as we will, none of us can run or swim the race of life under our own power. As in the race to Hawaii, there is something weak inside us that will break before we reach the finish line. This weakness we all know as sin, it stops us, it doesn’t matter if it stops us in first hours of the race or the last. It still stops us. Hear this! **Fallen short?** Yes! We all do! **But wait?** There is more to the story! Our hope is renewed as we see the rest of Paul’s message.

He says that we are “justified freely by (God’s) grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (3:24).

Grace, we have heard this word before. People are given it as a name. We say people are graceful in their actions, we talk about it in connection with God and his actions toward us. Put do we really, I mean really, know what that word means?

Grace is undeserved kindness. We had not right to receive it. We cannot claim it as a prize for our efforts. It is undeserved….yes, it is this undeserved kindness that saves us. There is a way to remember what GRACE means. Use it as an anacronym. Acronyms can be words formed by the initial letters or groups of letters of words in a set phrase or series of words and pronounced as a separate word like NASA, FEMA. G. R. A. C. E. God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. It is not that God brushed aside our sin saying it is no bid deal! He shows us how big a deal they really are by sending his Son to die a horrible death on the cross. Paul tells us that God has sent Jesus Christ to give us what we weren’t capable of winning on our own. He gives us a wonderful, free gift–– the gift of forgiveness––the gift of life.

The good news of the gospel, of course, is that we do not have to balance the books. If we did have to balance the books, life would be hopeless for us. But what we can’t do for ourselves, Christ does for us. His cross stands on the skyline saying, “debt cancelled.” **25whom God publicly displayed as the atonement seat through faith in his blood.**  The whole purpose of his life on earth was to make it possible for us to win the race of life. Paul says that we are “justified by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus….”

**A Tale of Two Chairs**

Let’s imagine that there are two chairs in the middle of an empty room. One chair is labeled “Do” and the other chair is labeled “Done.” Those two chairs represent the two kinds of religion in the world. Every religion is either a “Do” religion or a “Done” religion.

The “Do” religions are based on the notion that in order to please God you have to do something: Pray, be a member, give money, be good, keep a list of dos and don’ts, go to temples, make a pilgrimage, follow the rules, and so on. Although these religions may seem to be very different on the outside, they all teach that salvation is “earned” by the things you do.

In fact, every religion in the world is a “Do” religion, except one. Christianity is a “Done” religion.

Why is Christianity a **“Done”** religion? Because Jesus Christ did everything necessary for our salvation when he died on the cross. Nothing more needs to be added; nothing more could be added. His death is fully sufficient for the sins of the entire world.

**“How can I be saved?”** The question of every religion?

**Do**  **Done**  
“Do this and live” “It is finished”   
  
“Try harder and you might make it” “Try Trusting and you will make it!

Where are you sitting right now? On the “**Do”** chair or on the **“Done”** chair? Everyone in the world is sitting in one of those two chairs. Non-Christian religions are clearly on the “**Do”** chair, but sadly even some Christian denominations find themselves on the **“Do**” chair. The Devil sneaks in with his scam and tell you that God cannot cover it all. You need to help. You need to participate. Your good works will gain for you the Grace you need from God to finish the work.

When Martin Luther translated Romans 3:28 into German, he was criticized for adding the word “alone” to the text: **“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith alone apart from observing the law.”** But Martin Luther was right. That’s exactly what Paul meant. Salvation is by faith alone, there is no part from human works of any kind.

Why is that important? It eliminates human pride. The sin of pride. The very sin that brough down the Devil. **27What happens to boasting then? It has been eliminated. By what principle—by the principle of works? No, but by the principle of faith.** It makes salvation available to anyone who believes.

I found a 15-second video from “The 700 Club.” Pat Robertson was interviewing a Senator on the budget deficit. “Why can’t we get this deficit under control?” asked Pat. The Senator smiled and answered, “It’s like going to heaven, Pat. Everyone says they want to go to heaven, but most people aren’t willing to do what it takes to get there.” “What it takes” to go to heaven? That is the question. “Do or Done? The answer is simple. Found in our text. “Stop trying and start trusting.”

It was not at the 48 hour mark of the race, but at the very start of the race. At the crack of the starting gun. Even before anyone could plunge into the surf. Jesus did it. He swam, the whole way. He never gave up. He finished it. When he cried out. It is finished. **Done.** For you and for me. And he says, here….take the prize I wone for you. It is yours…free…full….complete.

Remember what I started with today. This month a lucky winner will get the Publisher’s clearing House prize. $5,000 a week for life. They would not have worked for it, or even deserved it. It is totally free. What a prize indeed.

Today I tell you this! You already have the prize. And it is worth much more than $5,000 a week for life. It is priceless and last into eternal life.

**Amen**