

Sermon summary August 26

Dr. Dale Skinner from St. Paul's United Church, Milton spoke on "What's wrong with being right?"

In the age of social media, it has become commonplace to find examples of individuals ventilating in angry rants to prove that their point of view is right. In Scripture righteousness is a key theme with a broad range of meanings that have to do with God's character and our human conduct. In the Old Testament, one attained righteousness by being faithful to the law and the teachings of the Torah. As the early church was being established, tensions arose within communities of believers who felt that they were right and others were not. This is the issue Paul addresses in his letter to the Romans where a rift had developed between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Because the latter were not circumcised, they were considered by the Jewish Christians to be outside the law and therefore not righteous. The Gentile Christians did not see circumcision as a requirement for a relationship with Christ. As each group insisted on being right, relationships between them were damaged.

Dr. Skinner offered an alternative to being right: focus on being "well" instead of being right. Being well would mean to be in community together. As the Psalmist writes in Psalm 112, a community that has achieved well-being "... Rises up in the darkness as a light; they are gracious, merciful and righteous... Their hearts are steady... They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor... Their righteousness endures forever".

Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to let go of the need to be right because righteousness in God's eyes does not originate in ourselves, but comes from God. "It is believing in an act of Divine forbearance that seeks to preserve the well-being of individuals and human community."

Surrendering the need to be right can result in a very different kind of victory – a victory over one's own ego. By letting go of what we think we must have can sometimes result in receiving what we most need. In Christ, God lets go of the need to be right and instead exhibits a deeper kind of righteousness. Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we witness God's righteousness that ultimately leads to restoration, wellness and peace. This is the wellness that God desires for each of us.

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The need to be “right” often leads to the breakdown of interpersonal relationships. God desires that we surrender the need to be right to achieve individual and community wellness. God surrendered the need to be right through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and through this act enabled us to have our relationship with Him restored so that we can live in wellness and peace.