

Rev. Lisa Schrott

February 22, 2026

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 & Romans 5:12-19

*The Path to Repair and Restoration: Obedience to God's Word*

Our second reading this morning is from Paul's letter to the church in Rome. While many view the letter to the Romans as an "early textbook on Christianity" because it addresses many important theological issues in a depth that is not seen in other letters by, or attributed to, Paul, it is important to keep in mind that Paul was writing to people that he had never met. He is introducing himself to this gathered community of followers of Christ in Rome, who were of both Jewish and non-Jewish heritage. So rather than a textbook of theology, scholars see Romans more as Paul explaining his understanding of some of the important theological issues of the day. Our scripture passage this morning comes from a section where Paul is explaining the origin of sin and death and how it is overcome through Christ. Paul uses the term "justification" to explain the process by which we are made "right" with God through Christ's obedience to God and God's word. Hear now these words from Romans chapter 5 verses 12-19.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—for sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. **The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life! One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one

man said yes to God and put many in the right. This is the way *The Message*, a faithful rendering of scripture into contemporary English by pastor and scholar Eugene Peterson, puts the last verses I read. “One person said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one person said yes to God and put many in the right.”

According to Paul, the one person who said “no” to God was Adam, and the person who said “yes” was Jesus Christ. Or as the NRSV UE phrases it, one person’s disobedience and trespasses led to death and condemnation for all (that would be Adam), and through one man’s obedience, the many will be made righteous (that would be Christ).

We heard Zach read the scripture from Genesis that speaks to Adam and disobedience. It is the allegorical story of the emergence of sin from Garden of Eden). And while Paul refers to Adam’s action as ones of disobedience – he did eat the apple after all – many scholars see the issue as more lack of trust in God’s providence, in God’s care. As one commentator has noted, “the serpent’s fundamental move is to contend that God is untrustworthy: first, by indirectly suggesting that God would deny human beings food ... and second, by insisting that God has lied (“You will not die”).... Accordingly, while pride or greed may be involved in the first couple’s decision, what’s primarily driving them is anxious mistrust.”<sup>1</sup> I particularly resonate with the notion that what is primarily driving the sin is anxious mistrust. Because friends, too many days that is the place where I am sitting. Anxious mistrust of what I see spinning around me in our world. And it is this anxious mistrust which led to Adam saying “no” to God and “yes” to what the world values. And this led many down the wrong path of sin and ultimately death.

And now Paul enters with his antidote to anxious mistrust. One person said “yes” to God, and by saying “yes” many will be made righteous. A major theme in Paul’s writing, especially in the first third of the letter, is the concepts of righteousness and justification. Justification is the fancy theological term for the process by which we are “made right” with God – how our righteousness is established. The act of being made right with God is not based on our merit, our works, our achievements or our beliefs. It is through our faith in the grace of Jesus Christ. It is a free gift that removes us from our sinful lives making us into a new creation. In our reformed understanding, the act of justification has already happened through Christ’s death on the cross – through Christ’s obedience to God’s plan for his life.

The terms justification and righteousness both have their origins in the legal fields. However, there is an aspect of righteousness – of being made right with God – that is important for us to consider, especially during the Lenten season. In the Biblical understanding, righteousness indicated a relationship with God that included both internal faith and outward ethical actions. Trust in the saving grace of Jesus Christ for one’s salvation frees one up to respond with

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<sup>1</sup> SALT Project. Trust: SALT’s Commentary for Lent 1. February 17, 2026. Online at <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/trust-saltlectionary-commentary-lent-1-year-a>

gratitude AND to respond with actions of mercy, healing, and justice. Another way of saying this is that **our response** to being made right with God through Jesus is that we strive to be obedient to God's word. This was the message that Jesus left his disciples after his ascension. The Gospel of Matthew ends with these words in Chapter 28:

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And what does God's word tell us to do – what are the commands – the imperatives for you English majors – that we hear in scripture?

To repent.

To care for creation.

To love God and neighbor, with a broad definition of neighbor.

To serve others... to feed, clothe, house, visit.

To welcome.

To spread the good news of God's love and grace.

What does it mean to be obedient to God's word? It means to work for repair and restoration of our world by living into the words of scripture. This is the road ahead of us this season of Lent, an invitation to a six week journey of reflection on being obedient to God's word. It is a time to reorient our lives — and so, as a first step, to examine where we're placing our trust and mistrust. To rid ourselves of anxious mistrust and replace it with actions that promote healing. This is the essence of repentance, the first step on our pathway.

We explored the theme of repentance on Ash Wednesday and I will explore it more in the Adult Ed time this morning. It is an important starting point because it consists of two aspects, first turning away from that which is a breach a the relationship between one another or between one and God, and second, turning toward God so that one can engage in new thoughts or behaviors to repair or restore the breach. The reformed theologian John Calvin says it this way - repentance has two faces— death of a corrupt sinful nature and new life in the Spirit of God. Departing from ourselves, we turn to God, and having taken off our former mind, we put on a new mind. Repentance is the conversion by which our old sinful self dies and a new life arises.<sup>2</sup> Our prayer of confession is structured each week as an act of repentance, asking for forgiveness followed by aspirations of living a life closer to God's will.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. I.XIII.14,138 and III.III.1,592

This Lent we are going to be intentional about the second part of repentance – about the actions we can take to draw closer to God and be vehicles of repair and restoration as the body of Christ. We may also think of these actions as strengthening and sustaining. We will end the Lenten season on Easter Sunday, April 5 as we will celebrate Christ’s resurrection – the ultimate act of repair and restoration. I shared a bit about our Lenten journey during the Children’s Time and Time for Wonder. And during the offering, I will be sharing the some concrete possible actions for the week ahead.

Many of us are feeling like the world around us is shattering and are not sure what we can do. During our Education Hour in the month of March we will be intentional in helping you as individuals and us as a congregation seek ways to be repairers of the breach. Next week, March 1, there will be a discussion of the Presbyterian Advocacy Hour: *Courage in the Face of Authoritarianism: Historical Roots and Modern Responses*. We hope some of you will be able to tune in for this webinar on Wednesday at Noon (information in the announcements). It will feature a policy and historical analysis tracing how U.S. “national security” frameworks have expanded over time, shaping domestic policing, civil liberties, and the treatment of protest and dissent, and helping us understand the systems behind what many communities are experiencing right now. The webinar will be anchored by theological reflection revisiting the Barmen Declaration, a confession of faith written in resistance to authoritarian rule. And importantly it will feature Presbyterian activists and organizers engaged in local public witness, who will share what faith-rooted organizing looks like on the ground, how communities build resilience under pressure, and what practical action can look like when the national picture feels overwhelming.

The discussion next week will set us up for an open forum on March 8 where we will gather in Fellowship Hall and brainstorm concrete actions we can take. There will be an opportunity to break into small groups for people interested in specific topics (like creation care, support of immigrants and refugees, housing and food insecurity) or types of actions (like advocacy, protest, neighbor to neighbor care). My hope and prayer is that we have broad representation at this forum, with people bringing their ideas, passion, imagination, energy, intelligence and love as we seek ways to be obedient to God’s call in our lives. March 15 we will learn more about Christian Nationalism and how we can respond as a people of faith. And on March 22 we will hear about ways our financial giving can be a legacy of our faith and values.

I shared some wise words from Robert Turner, author of *Creating a Culture of Repair* in the words of preparation in the bulletin this morning: “My faith teaches me that small acts by individuals can have a major impact on the lives of others, and even on my own soul. ... If individuals do something, no matter how small, it can have a major impact on others, and a cumulative effect as we seek to make this world more just.”<sup>3</sup> I want to leave you this morning

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Turner, *Creating a Culture of Repair. Taking Action on the Road to Reparations*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2024, p15.

with a bit of an article from *The NY Times* this week that speaks to power of individual actions to address an incredible need in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

Essayist Will McGrath writes: “In the resistance we drive minivans, we take ’em low and slow down Nicollet Avenue, our trunks stuffed with hockey skates and scuffed Frisbees and cardboard Costco flats. We drive Odysseys and Siennas, we drive Voyagers and Pacificas, we like it when the back end goes ka-thunk over speed bumps, shaking loose the Goldfish dust. One of our kids wrote “wash me” on the van’s exterior, etched it into the gray scurf of frozen Minneapolis slush. Our floor mats smell like mildew from the snowmelt. ... *Let us be bulletproof, let us be invisible.* We double-check the address, two new kids in the car pool today, three more families requesting rides in the Signal chat. We scan our phones to see which intersections to avoid ... In the resistance we drive the high school car pool, that holy responsibility, the ferrying of innocents among the wolves. We drive kids we’ve never met before from families afraid to leave their houses, and most mornings we’re in our pajamas....”

McGrath writes about the work he and others have been doing since December, when kids stopped going to school, not wanting to take buses and parents afraid to drive to the school. “A network of neighborhood moms and dads bloomed organically, divvying rides, vetting newcomers. There were no open calls, just friends talking with other friends, seeing who might want to help.” He shares about some of the kids and youth he has driven – their fears and their hopes. It is indeed a “holy responsibility” as McGrath terms it.

After talking about the broken families that will not be made whole again, McGrath ends with these words: “But you also need to understand — and this is equally important — that we’ve already won. The reward is right now, this minute, this moment. The reward is watching your city — whether it’s Chicago or Los Angeles or Charlotte or the cities still to come — organize in hyperlocal networks of compassion, in acephalous fashion, not because someone told you to, but because tens of thousands of people across a metro region simultaneously and instinctively felt the urge to help their neighbors get by.”<sup>4</sup>

We have a holy responsibility this Lenten season to work toward the repair and restoration of our community, our nation, the world and all of creation. I can’t think of a better definition of a church than a “hyperlocal network of compassion.” After all we are the body of Christ, the one person who said “yes” to God and put many in the right. Let us live as his followers, obedient to God’s word to repair and restore the brokenness in our world, as we strengthen and sustain our faith. Join me in prayer.

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<sup>4</sup> Will McGrath. In the Resistance We Drive Minivans. NY Times. February 22, 2026. Online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/18/opinion/minneapolis-ice-resistance-minivans.html>