

Title: What is Behind the Curtain?

Text: Romans 5:1-11

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“Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!” We can still hear it, can’t we? The booming voice. The smoke and fire. The four trembling visitors in **The Wizard of Oz** stand before what appears to be overwhelming power. And then a small dog named Toto tugs at the fabric. In just a moment, the curtain trembles and the illusion collapses. The great and powerful Oz turns out to be a little man pulling levers. We laugh because what was hidden turned out to be smaller than advertised. Now, let us note that Scripture speaks of another curtain. And the One behind that curtain is not small.

Our Lenten theme for 2026 is simple, profound, and demanding: *On the Way With Jesus*. Notice the movement in that phrase: we are not standing still or acting as spectators, but journeying. Lent is not a waiting room where we flip through old magazines until Easter calls our name. Lent is a road, and like every meaningful road, it bends. Where does this one bend? Lent’s purpose bends toward Jerusalem.

By the Third Sunday in Lent, we begin to feel the ache of the incline in the path. We sense the air is growing heavier. The Gospel messages sharpen with meaning. The road narrows. We sense that Jesus is not wandering aimlessly. Rather, he is moving with resolve. And if we are walking with Him, then we are moving toward confrontation, toward truth, and toward a cross.

And that is not a destination most of us would choose. Yet here we are. We walk with our Master and his raggy crew. Our journey and this season meet in our time together as pastor and congregation. We are in an interim time. The pastoral call is coming into focus. Still, we know the future is not fully visible. It would be easy, understandably, to treat this like a waiting room and hold our breath until the “real” chapter begins.

But Lent will not allow that posture. In fact, perhaps the interim time will not either. Why? Because we are not in a waiting room. We are most certainly on a road. Scripture guides us and lights our path on this journey. From the beginning, Scripture tells the story of distance.

In Eden, Adam and Eve respond to God’s presence by hiding rather than approaching. Here, their use of fig leaves serves as the first metaphorical curtain, creating distance between themselves and God. Shame is what weaves this barrier. The result: growing separation.

At Sinai, Moses removes his sandals before a bush that burns but is not consumed. Later, he sees only God’s back. Even for Moses, revelation is partial.

By the time Israel constructs the Temple, we see theology expressed as architecture. There are outer courts for Gentiles, inner courts for Jewish men, and restricted chambers for priests—a structure of increasing exclusivity. At the core is the Holy of Holies, hidden by a thick veil, beautifully woven in blue, purple, and scarlet. While it is visually striking, the curtain acts as a physical metaphor for separation from the divine.

The veil itself communicated silently: God’s holiness separates us. The thick curtain is a continuous reminder of real distance from God. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, only the High Priest passes through this boundary, carrying sacrificial blood and trembling with

reverence. Everyone else waits, reflecting a metaphorical and physical practice of spiritual waiting.

And if we are honest, we know something about that posture, don't we? We know how to keep God in sacred spaces and ourselves in manageable ones. We know how to let faith orbit the edges of life rather than penetrate its center. We even know how to do that in church life by quietly assuming that real access belongs to clergy, leaders, experts—while the rest of us remain respectfully outside the curtain.

But then we hear Paul's words in Romans 5, "*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Really? Peace with God? Recall, Paul writes those words into a violent world. The Roman Empire enforced order through the threat of cruelty, including crucifixion, and through military dominance. Political tension simmered constantly. Power was maintained through fear.

We hear those words in our unsettled moments, too. We see nations posturing for power and dominance. Missiles arc over Iran and its neighbors. Images of rubble and grief scroll past our screens. We wonder what peace could mean in such times.

Notice that Paul does not soften the diagnosis. He does not say we were mildly mistaken. He says we were weak. He says we were sinners. He even says we were enemies. Yes, he says we are enemies. That is not sentimental religion. That is rupture.

But then comes Paul's claim: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Not after improvement. Not after an apology. Not after institutional stability. Not after we got our act together. Paul states simply, "While we were still sinners." God does not wait for us to close the distance. God acts first and closes it.

The word "justified" in our text has several meanings. It is courtroom, covenant, and relational language. It means declared restored, brought near, reconciled. This does not happen because sin is ignored, but because it is dealt with. Here, the road to Jerusalem becomes steep. Reconciliation is not cheap.

The Gospels tell us that when Jesus breathes His last, the Temple veil is torn from top to bottom. This tearing is a deliberate reversal of the old boundary—a physical act that symbolizes the collapse of the divider between God and humanity. The distance is crossed not by human effort but by Christ's descent; the cross replaces the barrier, making the Holy of Holies accessible.

Now let's return to our starting point. In *The Wizard of Oz*, pulling back the curtain exposes mere machinery and an ordinary man, revealing a gap between appearance and reality. In contrast, at Jerusalem, the torn temple veil reveals not emptiness nor illusion, but access to something infinitely greater than expected.

We find that behind the curtain, the one is named Mercy. We expect judgment, and we encounter grace. And that changes everything.

Paul continues, "*We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.*" And then he says something almost unthinkable: "*We also boast in our sufferings.*" That sounds absurd in a fractured world.

Paul goes on to say that suffering, when held within God's reconciling love, produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint, because

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Not sprinkled. Not rationed. Poured.

So, here is the quiet word poured out for a church in interim time: peace with God is present tense. "Since we are justified... we have peace." Peace is not pending. Peace is not postponed, and peace is certainly not dependent on a "personnel" decision. Peace with God precedes institutional clarity and declares that this interim time is not empty time. We are in a formative time. This kind of space is where endurance grows, character deepens, and hope clarifies.

On the way to Jerusalem, the disciples let go of their assumptions. They expected spectacle. They imagined a throne. They looked for triumph. Instead, they encountered a cross. It was there, where defeat seemed obvious, that God's glory became fully revealed.

What if the interim time is not a deficit but a revelation? What if certain curtains of comfort, predictability, and control are trembling not because God has left, but because God is inviting us closer? Closer to shared priesthood. Closer to shared responsibility. Closer to shared prayer. Let's consider this possibility as we continue. What if access was never meant for just one voice? What if it belongs to the multiethnic and multivocal speeches of God's people? And what about us personally?

Maybe we have been hiding behind a curtain of shame. Maybe we have assumed holiness belongs to someone else. Maybe we have been waiting for everything to "settle" before stepping fully into your calling. Hear the good news of the Gospel: the veil is torn, the distance is closed, and the worst truth about us is already known and already met with mercy. We do not have to hide. Not from God. Not from one another. The fig leaves can fall.

And what about the world? We grieve about violence. We wrestle with moral complexity. We pray for restraint and justice. But Romans 5 fixes our horizon: if God reconciled enemies through the death of His Son, then reconciliation—not retaliation—is the final word of history. That does not make policy simple. But it does shape the church. We are a reconciled people.

We know what it is to be called enemies and then called beloved. That reality reshapes us. How do we speak? How do we disagree? How do we pray? How do we refuse to reduce any human being to an abstraction? Our deepest allegiance is not to fear. It is to the crucified and risen Lord who walked deliberately toward Jerusalem.

So we return to the curtain. In the story of Oz, the curtain hides weakness and illusion. In Jerusalem, the torn veil reveals immeasurable greatness—the very presence of self-giving love. There is no manipulator at work, only a welcoming God. The metaphor reverses: the torn veil no longer conceals but reveals. It is waiting to be reconciled.

So let's walk. Let us walk toward Jerusalem, knowing a cross stands there, but also knowing resurrection waits beyond it. Let us walk through the interim time, trusting Christ is not absent but ahead of us. Let us walk into a troubled world, carrying peace that is rooted not in treaties but in a torn veil. Join in this walk; embody peace as you go.

And perhaps, as we walk steadily in uncertainty... graciously in disagreement... hopefully in a fractured age... someone will look at this congregation and say: "That is where God is." Not smaller than advertised. But larger than we ever dared hope. Amen.