

## **SUSAN'S SAGA**

The Mixtec translation team is currently revising the book of Romans. A big theme is justification. Now that's one of those weighty theological terms that isn't commonly used in daily speech. The word in English derives from Latin. So just what does it mean in ordinary, everyday language?

We have struggled for a number of years to find a phrase that expresses this concept in Mixtec. It had us stumped for a long time, as we tried to explain it to the Mixtecs and come up with an expression for it. One day we re-visited the term, and it finally came out. Suppose one person's cows get into someone else's cornfield. That is a huge offense in Mixtec society, as corn is extremely valuable, because it's the staff of life. If someone's animals get into another person's cornfield, then the first party has to recompense the offended party.

Now suppose a third party steps in and pays the damages incurred by the cows. There is a Mixtec word for that. Literally it is something like "to cut the cost." But the larger concept is that an intervening person takes on the responsibility of paying the damages.

As we consider the death and resurrection of Jesus during this Lenten season, it is fitting to keep in mind that we are the ones who have run up a huge debt of offenses against the righteous, holy standard of God. Who can intervene to pay the damages? The situation is hopeless by human means. Christ steps in as the third party and pays the damages on our behalf. That is justification.

It doesn't deny that we have offended God, because we have. Romans 3:23 asserts, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Justification does not pretend that there is no offense, nor does it belittle the consequences. Neither does it reduce the faults and errors we have committed as trivial or inconsequential. Big offenses require a huge compensation. And that is exactly what Christ provides, by sheer grace.

May we embrace the incredible sacrifice of Christ that justifies us before Holy God.

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Scripture quote from Romans 3:23, New American Standard Bible.

*Susan Huggins is serving in full-time ministry as a Bible translator among the Mixtec people of Oaxaca, Mexico. Susan's sending agency, Wycliffe Bible Translators, is a non-denominational organization; she raises her own funds to support this ministry.*