

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost Rally Day

Date: September 9, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9

Epistle Reading: Ephesians 6:10–20

Gospel Reading: Mark 7:14–23

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9

Sermon Title: Teach The Children

Introit: Psalm 51:7,10-12; Antiphon: Psalm 51:2

Hymns:

LSB 655 – Lord Keep Us Steadfast In Your Word

LSB 869 – With the Lord Begin Your Task (v.1,3,5)

LSB 865 – Lord Help Us Ever to Retain

LSB 582 – God's Word is Our Great Heritage (*Offering*)

LSB 657 – A Mighty Fortress Is Our God



Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



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Text: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Israel, listen to the laws and rules I am about to teach you. Obey them so that you will live and be able to enter and take possession of the land that the Lord God of your ancestors is giving you. Never add anything to what I command you, or take anything away from it. Then you will be able to obey the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

Faithfully obey these laws. This will show the people of the world your wisdom and insight. When they hear about all these laws, they will say, “What wise and insightful people there are in this great nation!”

What great nation ever had their gods as near to them as the Lord our God is near to us whenever we pray to him? What other great nation has such fair laws and rules as all these teachings I am giving you today?

However, be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you don’t forget the things which you have seen with your own eyes. Don’t let them fade from your memory as long as you live. Teach them to your children and grandchildren.

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Grace to you and peace in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Deuteronomy is a strange word isn't it? Have you ever wondered what the word Deuteronomy means? Probably not, but humor me and try to look interested while I tell you. It is a conjunction of two Greek words: δυο {pronounced: DOO-oh} meaning two and νομος {pronounced: NO-mos} meaning Law. So it is the Second Law.

It is not an addition to the Law of God, given to the people of Israel after the Exodus. It is a second giving of the Law. Joshua is now in charge of the people. He is their leader and he reads the Laws of God given to them through Moses 40 years earlier.

You see there is a whole new generation of people now. Everyone who left Egypt is dead, except for Joshua and a few select others. You might recall that the people of Israel were so hard hearted and stubborn that God forbid them the opportunity to enter the Promised Land. He forced them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. During that time nearly everyone who came out of Egypt died.

Joshua knows that these are the children of stubborn people so he wants to make sure they know what God expects of them. So he reads it to them. That is what the book of Deuteronomy is. Joshua giving the Law to the people again. He reads the Law to them with this command:

Listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them,
that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the
LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.¹

He reminds them that a people who are obedient to God are a people blessed by God. This is the same Law that we are given. It is often thought that the Old Testament is no longer important because Jesus gave us the New Testament. That's not quite true. Much of the Old Testament is still very much the Law of God for us.

Jesus provides the freedom to live under the Gospel, or New Testament, so obedience to the Law is not what pleases God, but rather faith in Jesus who obeyed the Law for us. So things like sacrifices and rules about what kind of food you can eat are lifted. Which is why we no longer sacrifice animals at church, and you can have your bacon for breakfast. He did not abolish the Old Testament. He fulfilled it or kept it for us in our place.

What does remain is the same instruction and duty to teach these Laws of God to our children. This is probably the most important instruction we can give them. Think for a moment about your children. They are eternal beings. They will live forever. Like you they will someday be given a permanent address. When you teach them about God's Word, and the God who loves them and saved them, you are helping ensure where that will be.

I've heard people say things like, "Children shouldn't go to church. You are just indoctrinating them. They should make their own decision when they are old enough." In fact I actually heard that in a class at the seminary. (Which, I might add, didn't go well for the person who said it.)

With all due respect that is neglect. Your children should be precious to you. They should know that you love them. If you love them you should care enough to want to ensure they know what it means to be a faithful Christian who worships and honors the Creator of the Universe. If you don't teach them who will?

¹ Deuteronomy 4:1

Martin Luther taught this very same principle. If you look at the introduction to the Small Catechism you will see these words:

As the head of the family should teach them, in a simple way to his household.

You see Luther went on a tour of the churches to see how the people were doing after the Roman Catholic Church had expelled so many congregation. What he saw terrified and appalled him. He found people who did not know the most basic principles of the faith and pastors who did not know how to teach it.



The church had become so corrupt and controlling that pastors were given sermons to read. They were not allowed to do their own work. They didn't know how to teach the people. What he writes point out clearly how concerned he was, as only Martin Luther could say:

They all maintain that they are Christians, have been baptized, and receive the Lord's Supper. Yet they do not understand, and cannot recite, either the Lord's Prayer, or the Apostles' Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs...²

So Martin Luther wrote the Small Catechism first, to get that into the congregations and homes, so that people could begin to study and learn God's Word. He then wrote a Large Catechism for the pastors to teach more in depth studies on the truths of Scripture.



That is our heritage. To teach the Word of God. To read it every time we gather for worship. To study it and apply it to our lives. My goal (and I hope I achieve it from time to time) is teach you God's Word in a way that you can employ in your life. That's what I am trying to do for you. It is the same thing you do when you teach your children at home, when you read those Bible lessons, or do a devotion, or pray with your children before bedtime or at a meal.

All of that is part of passing the Law of God to your children, and to your children's children, on down through the generations. That is how it was brought to many of you. Generations back, in your family, the Word of God came to them and in their wisdom they passed that down, eventually to you. For others you might be the first generation to come to faith. For you it is leaving a legacy that changes your family tree forever. God be praised!

How do you do that? How should you teach your children? Deuteronomy chapter 11 gives us a good place to start. There we read:

Take these words of mine to heart and keep them in mind. Write them down, tie them around your wrist, and wear them as headbands as a reminder. Teach them to your children, and talk about them when you're at home or away, when you lie down or get up. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates. Then you and your children will

live for a long time in this land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors—as long as there’s a sky above the earth.³

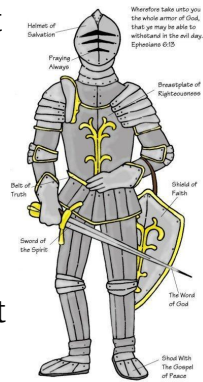
In other words teach them always. That is part of the reason you come here every week. So that you can be taught and in turn continue to teach your family.

The next question is why? Why do we have to study God’s Word? We know God loves us, died for us, and saves us. We know the important stuff so why do we need to learn more? That is where the Epistle reading for today comes in. Do you remember the words Paul wrote? He said:

This is not a wrestling match against a human opponent. We are wrestling with rulers, authorities, the powers who govern this world of darkness, and spiritual forces that control evil in the world.⁴

Satan is very real and he is coming for you. Even if you don’t believe that. Our weapon is God’s Word. The whole armor of God is described to us by Paul when he writes:

For this reason, take up all the armor that God supplies. Then you will be able to take a stand during these evil days. Once you have overcome all obstacles, you will be able to stand your ground. So then, take your stand! Fasten truth around your waist like a belt. Put on God’s approval as your breastplate. Put on your shoes so that you are ready to spread the Good News that gives peace.



In addition to all these, take the Christian faith as your shield. With it you can put out all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Also take salvation as your helmet and God’s word as the sword that the Spirit supplies.

Pray in the Spirit in every situation. Use every kind of prayer and request there is...⁵

Paul here is describing a man preparing for battle, putting on his fighting armor. However this armor is not made of metal, leather, and Kevlar. It is made of words. Words through which God works to do His will. How do simple words have that kind of power? Because God says they do. In the book of the great prophet Isaiah, chapter 55, it reads:

Rain and snow come down from the sky. They do not go back again until they water the earth. They make it sprout and grow so that it produces seed for farmers and food for people to eat.

My word, which comes from my mouth, is like the rain and snow. It will not come back to me without results. It will accomplish whatever I want and achieve whatever I send it to do.⁶

Up here when we Baptize a person what happens? In that Baptism you receive forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart and instills in you faith in the One True God. How can that be? It is only water and some words. It can be because God said so.

3 Deuteronomy 11:18-21

4 Ephesians 6:12

5 Ephesians 6:13-18

6 Isaiah 55:10-11

Up here when we enjoy the Lord's Supper, what happens? Again you receive forgiveness for your sins and you are made holy again. How can that be? It is only bread and wine and some words. It can be because God said so.

He says so in His Word. That is why we study His Word and why we want to make it part of our heart and life. That is why we pass it down to the generations that follow us. Because God works through His Word.

Satan is a very powerful being. He was called Lucifer which means "son of the dawn." He very well may have been the most glorious thing God created, powerful and majestic, a glorious sight to behold. He is still powerful. Far more powerful than you or me. So how do you fight such an overwhelmingly powerful beast? With weapons of greater might. With the Word of God. That is why we study it. That is why we teach it to our children.

It does one more thing. It keeps us right in our relationship with God and others. It teaches us how God wants us to live. Not with oppressive rules that limit us but with guidance that protects us. It teaches us what He wants from us. It teaches us how God wants us to worship Him. It teaches us how God wants us to honor Him. As it becomes part of who we are it cleans up those things that come out from us. That was the message in the Gospel reading for today. Do you remember what Jesus said there?

[Jesus] called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and try to understand! Nothing that goes into a person from the outside can make him unclean. It is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. Let the person who has ears listen!"

Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand? Don't you know that whatever goes into a person from the outside can't make him unclean? It doesn't go into his thoughts but into his stomach and then out..."⁷

There are all sorts of evil things that come from evil hearts. Hearts that do not have God's Word in them. When we come together here, or you in your homes, to study God's Word you are putting into your heart things that bring cleansing and healing to your heart. They clean you up on the inside and so clean up what comes out of you for all the world to see. It makes you different.

Now that doesn't mean you have to walk around with your big ol' Bible, quoting passages from memory, everywhere you go. We live in this world and need to function in this world. What God's Word does is teach you how to function as a man of honor and integrity. It teaches you how to live as a godly woman of grace.

You see when it comes right down to it this book, the Bible, is only words. The book has no power. The paper, leather, and ink do not come from special "holy places." The Church does not grow special holy forests for the paper, and raise special holy cows for the leather. It's just a book and if God's Word is just words than this book is just a book and it really has little worth at all.

But it's not just a book. This, children of God, is the Word of God. This is God revealing Himself to us. Showing us that He loves us. Showing us that He saved us. Showing us that what waits for us is something wonderful. So teach it to your children, and to their children, on down through the generations. Leave for your family a legacy of pride and strength forever. Found in faith.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.