

18th Sunday after Trinity, October 16, 2022

Readings: *Deuteronomy 10: 12-21, 1 Corinthians 1: 1-9, Matthew 22:34-46*

In Life and Death, Christ Fulfills the Law of God

The Pharisees ask a Law question. Jesus asks a Gospel question. The Pharisees seek to test Jesus in His own words. Jesus seeks to “test” them in the saving reality of who He is as the Messiah (Matt. 22:34–46). The Law requires you to “*fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*” and to “*love the sojourner*” (Deut. 10:12–21). Failure to keep the Law perfectly brings judgment. On the other hand, the Gospel brings the grace of God given by Jesus Christ, that you may be blameless in the day of His return (1 Cor. 1:1–9). Jesus is David’s Son yet David’s Lord, true God and true man. He is Love incarnate who fulfilled all the demands of God’s Law on our behalf, that we might be saved from the Law’s condemnation and sanctified in the Gospel’s forgiveness. Thereby we see that “*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1 Cor. 1:9).

Sermon Transcript:

Peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What does the Lord demand of us? What does He require of you, but “to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all of His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today.” Is that all? Really, that's all that God demands of us, that He requires of us if we just do this? That seems a little overwhelming when it gets right down to it. And then Jesus asking, "What is the greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself." Now we might think, I mean, we love God. He's, after all, God, and we worship Him. We praise Him. We think very highly of Him. Our neighbor, on the other hand, maybe not so much. He doesn't prove himself to be very faithful very often. He doesn't prove himself to be very conscientious. Sometimes he's rude and disrespectful.

Oh yeah, that also means I am the rude neighbor to my other neighbors sometimes as well. It's very easy for us to think about loving God. I mean, we come to church every Sunday. We sing hymns of praise. We give money in the offering plate. We sing. We praise God and we love Him. But that neighbor thing, I don't know, that's just a lot to ask for, especially when they're ignorant and they don't know what they're talking about and they constantly open their mouths and they prove how much they don't understand. And yet God desires us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Why? Because He loves you. And if He loves you, who is just as obnoxious and rude as your neighbor, then we are called to know that He loves them as much as He loves us. And if He loves them as much as he loves us, then we ought to love our neighbor.

See, this is why we do not rely upon our own strength, our own understanding, and our own efforts for our hope of salvation. Because we can't do it. Even though we think we love God, we fail just by not loving our neighbors, amongst everything else that we do that goes against God. And so what hope do we have? I mean, after all, this is the Lord our God to whom belongs the heaven, the heavens above the heavens, the Earth and everything that is in it. This is the God of the universe who created all things. What hope do we have of having a positive relationship with Him? Absolutely none except for this -- That this God who owns all things, who controls all things, this Lord has set His heart in love on your fathers, He says to the Israelites. The Lord chose

the Israelites to put His love upon them. Now, if you looked on the outward example of the Israelites, these would not be the logical people that God would choose. They were stiff-necked. They were constant complainers. They chased after other gods all the time. Even when they saw the great and terrifying things-- Remember this is right after the 10 plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the army of Egypt--After all of this, what do they do? They grumble and complain against God. They build a false idol and they start worshiping another god after all of that.

So you would not look at the Israelites and say, "Obviously those are the people of God," but because God chose them, they received His grace and mercy. And not only has God chosen them, He has chosen you and me and we are called to be His children, we are called to put our hope in His work, not in our own, but to be encouraged by His work, to do good to others, to do good to our neighbors. Paul writes in 1st Corinthians, and he talks to the Corinthians about how they've been sanctified in Christ and they've been called to be saints and they have received the grace of God and the mercy of God. They have been enriched in every way in speech and knowledge. They've got the testimony confirming Him. They've got all spiritual gifts. He's praising the Corinthians for this faithfulness. But if you know anything about the Corinthians, these were the problem children of the New Testament. Paul had to write two letters to the Corinthians, both times chastising them for their failure to do what is right in the eyes of God. They misunderstood the Lord's supper. They misunderstood the use of wealth. They misunderstood a lot of things. And yet Paul is still saying that they have received every good and gracious gift from God, that they have all spiritual gifts. Not because of what they have done or how faithful they have been, but because how faithful our God is towards them, towards the Israelites, and towards us. And what a joy it is to know that we have received all good things from God, and because we have received all of this, we are called to receive the circumcision of our hearts, not just our flesh.

In the Old Testament, the rite of circumcision was the means by which a person was brought into the covenant of God. It was a sign, a physical sign of a spiritual reality. They were the people of God. God had chosen them, but the physical circumcision was not the ultimate thing that needed to take place. It was a circumcision of the heart, the cutting away of the sinful nature that is within us that He desires, that He wants us to do. And in that, we have already received that circumcision of the heart, that is our baptisms. In our baptism God cuts away the sin, our sinful nature. So much so that He drowns our sinful nature in the waters of baptism. And we have brought forth a new creation. All the evil, all the sin is cut away from us and we are now children of God chosen by Him and loved and the recipients of every good and perfect gift. And because we have received that, not because we've earned it, but we've received it as a gift, we are called to share that gift with one another, with our obnoxious neighbor out there, that we would really rather not interact with. With that person that we disagree with. With that person that seems wrong in every way, shape, or form. Well, that person that is just plain irritating because this neighbor can be irritating at times as well. This neighbor is wrong, oftentimes. This neighbor still sins, and yet God still loves me. And if He loves me, He loves my neighbor. And how can I do anything less than what God has done for me to love him as He has loved me?

See, we are never able to achieve the perfection that God demands. That's just not what we are able to do. However, by the grace of God and filled with the Holy Spirit, having been created new in our baptisms, we are empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit to do good, the good of God to our neighbors. The faulting efforts that we make are still blessed by God and are still used by Him for His honor and glory, to bring our fellow sinners into the fold of His family, Jesus Christ, because we are comforted by His love and we are sanctified by

His work, not our own. May we always act in confidence and certainty that God loves us, and He loves our neighbor, and let us serve one another out of thankfulness for His grace and mercy.

May that grace, mercy, and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.