

JESUS “DID THE LAW” PERFECTLY

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Hear again the Word of God, the second sentence of our reading from the

Letter to the Corinthians:

From [God] all of you remain in Christ Jesus, Who became Wisdom for us from God – righteousness certainly, and holiness, and redemption – that, as it was written, “The one continually boasting, in (the) Lord he must continue to boast.”¹

Your salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life are God’s gifts to you in Christ Jesus. That is a great message with which the Church begins the Sundays of Epiphany. God’s gifts of salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life are revealed and given in the Person of the Son through the means God determined. In today’s text, God’s Wisdom incarnate, Jesus the Christ, is defined by St. Paul as righteousness, holiness, and redemption. That is to say, Wisdom is defined as being declared right with God; remaining holy in His presence; and having had the price paid for your sins – all in Christ Jesus. God’s Wisdom in Christ was to place Him under the Holy Law that He might buy you back from that which you and all people by human conception and birth have earned passively and actively – eternal death. That is to say, what everyone of us deserves because we are children of Adam is permanent separation from the Living God. God’s Wisdom comes to attach to Himself those torn from Him by sin.

A few days ago many of us learned that, in Jesus’ circumcision, *His holy, precious blood is first spilled in His mission to defeat sin, death and the devil.*² Many of you

¹ *1 Corinthians* 1:30-31.

² Morehouse, Michael A., *THE SHEDDING OF BLOOD FOR SALVATION*, Catalina Lutheran Church, January 1, 2007. p. 1.

will recall that by following the Old Covenant rite of male circumcision, just eight days after His birth, Jesus was placed under the demands of the Old Testament Law. That may help you recall that the Word of God declares that Jesus came not *to dismantle the Law or the Prophets...but to fulfill* [them], and that this began passively at His circumcision, and, today, as you have heard, actively in His Baptism.³

Today from the Gospel reading, wherein the Father's declaration of Jesus as His Beloved Son was accompanied by the descent of the Holy Spirit, you have heard the divine ratification of God's mission for the Son. In His Baptism, Jesus shows His free and complete willingness to perfectly fulfill the Law in order to pay the price God demands for all human sin, including those inherited from Adam, and those to which you have added to Adam's unholy work. Jesus "did the Law" perfectly, fulfilling God's commands, paying the complete price as the ultimate and final blood sacrifice in order to be able to declare every human ever conceived as sinless before the Father. His active work on your behalf is described as St. Matthew reports:

*Then Jesus comes alongside, from Galilee by the Jordan, toward John to be baptized by him.*⁴

Jesus, who was without sin, is found coming to the man, His cousin, who had been baptizing men and women *into repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. Jesus had nothing for which He needed to repent. Rather, He came to change baptism in the

³ *Matthew* 5:17.

⁴ *Matthew* 3:13.

Church of His New Testament forever. From the moment following Jesus' being washed, until the Last Day, baptism has become a washing of regeneration and renewal.⁵

The change in baptismal washing that was necessary so that all who would be, after this event, washed into the Name of the Lord, began with Jesus coming to the last of the Old Testament prophets. John, who knew he was the forerunner of the Messiah, the Anointed One of God promised for so long, did not go looking for Him. He was simply following his calling in life, his own vocation. While he was living his life in the work God had called him to do, John was approached by Jesus.

Hear this clearly: John did not seek Jesus. Jesus sought him. John did not choose to follow Jesus. In fact, John initially desired to refuse Jesus that which He had come to receive. And, after Jesus left His baptismal site, to be led into the wilderness to face temptation, John kept on performing his calling in life, until the government of the day put a stop to his work. Truly, it was only when Jesus spoke the Word that showed how God's righteousness was to be fulfilled out of Jesus' baptism that John agreed to wash Jesus.

That historical reality is clear evidence of how God chooses to reach all people. He comes to them, to fulfill God's Word. He comes to them through His spoken Word. While wise people still try to seek God, it is He who finds them. In terms of forgiveness, life, and salvation, Jesus is not lost, we are, until He comes to us through His chosen means of grace! From the event in time when Jesus approached John to be

⁵ Cf. *Titus* 3:5.

washed in the sins of all mankind, God's Word shows that this seminal baptismal event prepares the way for the manner in which God has chosen from that time forward to approach all sinners. It is to sinners who have been washed with the water and Word which flow from the Baptism of our Lord that the first sentence of our reading from Paul's inspired Letter to the Church at Corinth speaks. Hear again God's Word to the Church, to sinner/saints washed into the death and resurrection of Jesus (it is a long quote, but, it is also a repetition of the thoughts you heard read earlier):

All of you continue to consider your calling, O brothers, because not many (of you were) wise according to (the) flesh, not many (were) powerful, not many (were) of noble birth; but the moronic things of the cosmos God selected for Himself, that He might continue to put to shame the wise, and the weak of the cosmos God selected for Himself, that He might continue to put to shame the strong, and the low-born of the cosmos, also the things having been despised, God selected for Himself, the things which are not, that the things being may be made inactive, so not may boast all flesh before God.⁶

That is the second time you heard that passage today, a second translation of God's inspired Word. The ancients, to whom the Letter was first written and read, were used to memorizing information in great quantities. Paper, and animal skins, called vellum, was extremely expensive, so their culture used repetition and memorization as the means to transmit important information. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures were inspired to be read verbally – out loud – into the ears. That is the manner in which people two thousand years ago were accustomed to receiving and retaining information.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

Following the clear guidance of the Word of God, His Word is read into our ears every Lord's Day, every Feast Day, every day God gathers His people to bring them His gifts. Yet, we are all 21st century American people. We are accustomed to "sound bites," short verbal blasts of information purposefully designed to imprint verbal images in our minds. Unless we train ourselves, or allow ourselves to be trained, long quotes are lost on us. Our minds drift, we lose attention, and the point of the message may be lost on us. That is why, when a pastor is going to give us a long quote to hear, he tells us it is long, so that we can become more active listeners. Yet, the pastor also should know how the people of the culture in which he is preaching listen. The Word of God is important, and not just for your salvation, but also for your life now under the Cross. That is why long passages are broken apart, "preached through," just as we are doing. Hear now one way in which a sixty-eight Greek word sentence may be translated, divided, and proclaimed for our century (thank God for the little "marker words" He inspired, so that we can usually figure out where commas and semi-colons should be in such quotes)!

Our sentence begins: *all of you continue to consider your calling, O brothers...*

That means that the words following are for those who have been called by God into the Faith. Paul's opening words are meant to reinforce in all the members of the congregation that they are a family in Christ, brothers in Christ, having one God and Father. The concept of "all who are called" then applies to all generations of the Church. That means that you each and all are to consider who you were when you were called,

not simply as sinners, but also the manner of life in which you lived – including your worldly vocation.

That is made clear with these next words, *because not many (of you were) wise according to (the) flesh, not many (were) powerful, not many (were) of noble birth...* Look around you. Many of you were called into the Faith of Christ when you had not even learned to speak, to dress yourself, to feed yourself. Of those of us in the Church in this place, we who became one in the Faith as adults, not many of us were great scholars, powerful leaders, or “blue bloods.” (In practice, in the U.S., one’s being known to be of “noble birth” could bring contempt from others. After all, we live in a culture where people seem to want to use the simplest form of a person’s first name, in all circumstances, whether we know them, or not. Americans rebel against authority of title, and seek to reduce everyone to the lowest common denominator).

That is not that which Paul is doing. He is simply pointing out that God chooses many believers not on the basis of who they are, what they have done, or their family trees. On the other hand, he is *not* excluding those who are wise, powerful, or of royal bloodlines. He says, “many were not,” not “any were not.”

To continue making his point that Christians are not chosen by God on account of who they are but on account of Who He is, Paul continues, *but the moronic things of the cosmos God selected for Himself...* The Word is speaking from the human perspective. To the ancients, and to many people today, it just seems silly that God would not choose the best humans for Himself.

But that is just what He does. That is what we confess every time we use the personal words of public and private confession of sin. God does not call the proud; He takes pride in the humble He has called. Why does He call people from all walks of life, from all intelligence levels, from all bloodlines?

St. Paul gives God's answer: *that He might continue to put to shame the wise, and the weak of the cosmos God selected for Himself, that He might continue to put to shame the strong, and the low-born of the cosmos, also the things having been despised, God selected for Himself...* Even to our sound-bite attuned ears, those words should ring clear. God works His will in opposites to humble the proud and to bring them to repentance, that He might save them too!

St. Paul continues, *God selected for Himself the things which are not, that the things being may be made inactive...* There is a great insult in those words which we cannot grasp without explanation. At the time those words were inspired, people understood the gods to have "being." To have "unbeing," to be "the things which are not," is to be the lowest of the low.

That is just how Christianity's first through third century critics viewed the members of the Church. They saw Christians as "unbeings," with no social, worldly, or cosmic standing. Yes, Christianity's critics left off the "m," and held that not "any were wise, powerful, or of noble birth. "Would not a true god choose only the best for himself?" Christian critics would ask - and they still do!

Yet, you know the mystery of God shown in His choosing you by grace and not by your works, words, thoughts, and life, as St. Paul declares” so *(they) may not boast - - all flesh -- before God.* God chose simple means by which He imparts the Faith, means intended to prevent us from boasting of our place with Him. He comes to us, just as He came to John the Baptizing One. He brings His Word to fulfill all righteousness. He uses His Word to change our way of thinking to His way. Then, to keep us on His Way, He grants us His word, in our ears, hearts, and thoughts, to hold us in Him all the days of our life.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

The Baptism of Jesus (*LSB* One-year series)

Isaiah 42:1-7; I Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 3:13-17

January 8, 2012

Paster Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Then Jesus comes alongside, from Galilee by the Jordan, toward John to be baptized by him.⁷

But John tried to prevent Him, repeatedly saying, "I have need to be baptized by You; yet You come to me?"⁸

But answering, Jesus said to him, "You must permit it now. For thus it remains fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permits Him.⁹

Then, having been baptized, Jesus immediately came up from the water. And behold, were opened to Him the heavens and He saw the Spirit of God descending like (a) Dove, also coming upon Him.¹⁰

Then behold, (a) Voice from the heavens saying, "This One remains My Son, the Beloved One in Whom I am well pleased."¹¹

⁷ *Matthew 3:13.*

⁸ *Matthew 3:14.*

⁹ *Matthew 3:15.*

¹⁰ *Matthew 3:16.*

¹¹ *Matthew 3:17.*