

In Nomine Jesu

The Law Fulfilled

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever just wished people would do things the way they are supposed to do them? Have you ever thought, “If they would just fill out the right paperwork, this would be a lot quicker.” Or maybe, “If you would just follow the rules, everything would run smoothly.”

Sometimes, you’ve just got to do what you’re supposed to do. With God this is particularly true. He set things up in the way that He did for a reason. Think of all the little details that God had to establish to keep everything running smoothly. Whether we’re speaking of the way He set up the Garden of Eden so that we would have food, or the way He set up the solar system so that we didn’t all freeze to death. God had everything set up perfectly.

And then we come in and throw a wrench into everything. Man, the ones who God had created all of these things for, are the ones who come in and throw everything off-kilter.

But even this, God planned for. He knew that we would fall. He knew that we would mess everything up. So, He gave us a way to fix everything. He gave us a way that everything could be restored to normal. And that way is the Law.

Oh, wait, were you expecting something different? Maybe something like the Gospel? Well today, the Law is the Gospel, but not Lawspel. To be specific, the fulfillment of the Law is the Gospel.

In our Gospel text for today, Mary and Joseph are fulfilling the Law of the Moses. They have circumcised Jesus, as was required by the Old Covenant. Now they are presenting Him to the Lord, again according to the Old Covenant. In doing so, a prophecy is fulfilled and we meet a prophet by the name of Simeon. He declares Jesus to be the Christ, and gives to us a song that we call the Nunc Dimittis. Our reading begins with Mary and Joseph’s response:

And it was the father of Him and the mother marveled about the things being spoken concerning Him.¹

I spoke in my sermon on Christmas Day about how marveling at the Word of God is not really the best response. This is because when you are marveling or wondering about

¹ Luke 2:33

something, you aren't normally sharing that Word which you just heard. However, Mary and Joseph did not just marvel at these words. They preserved them. Or at least Mary did, and I'm willing to give the man who our Lord chose to be His Son's stepfather the benefit of the doubt. Scripture does after all declare him to be righteous. Let's continue on:

And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary the mother of Him, "Behold this Infant is the falling and rising of many in Israel and is a sign being spoken against."²

How would you like to say that to a new mother? Her Son is a sign being spoken against. True though it may be, I'm willing to bet that you mothers out there probably wouldn't want that said about your children. Yet Simeon did say it, because he was a prophet, and a prophet says what he's supposed to say. He isn't done yet either:

And you also, it will go through the soul as a sword, that being revealed from many hearts inner thoughts.³

Well that's not any better is it? Again, this just seems like something that would be a bit awkward to be telling a new mother. But again, this is Simeon's job. Simeon was given a task by the Lord, and he completed that task.

Of course, the prophecy was fulfilled. Jesus was the first sign of the falling of many: The Sadducees, the Levites, the Temple. He was also the rising of many, His entire church.

He's certainly a Sign which is spoken against. Islam, Judaism, Atheism and Agnosticism: all of them speak against Jesus in some fashion or other.

Also, a sword definitely pierced the heart of Mary. Many swords in fact. Jesus' own Word, calling those who followed Him His mother and brothers, rather than His biological family right outside the doors. Another sword pierced her when she saw Him tortured, mocked, and crucified. Even seeing Him raised on Easter morning would be a sword that pierced her in its own way.

² Luke 2:34

³ Luke 2:35

Lastly, in His interaction with others, Jesus rarely let people keep their thoughts hidden. He frequently would call people out on their own inner thoughts, bringing to light that which they would have preferred to keep hidden.

All of these are examples of Jesus fulfilling prophecies concerning Himself. When Jesus says that the Law and the Prophets are speaking of Him, this is what He means. He is the fulfillment of them all, both the Law and the Prophets.

Before we go too deep into that though, our reading shifts over to another person. We now hear of the prophetess Anna:

Also was Anna, a prophetess, daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher (she was forward in many days, living with her husband for seven years from her maidenhood and she was a widow for eighty four years) who did not go away from the Temple, fasting and seeking prayer night and day. And she at that hour stood professing to God and speaking concerning Him all the fulfillments of the redemption of Jerusalem.⁴

And so we meet a Prophetess. A very old Prophetess, who spent her days fasting and praying. Today in our reading, she is in fact the one who points out the exact reason that Jesus had come. He came to be the fulfillment of the redemption of Jerusalem.

That is who Jesus is, He is your redemption. He is the One who redeemed, or bought back, humanity. Jesus literally bought you with His own blood. By dying on the Cross, He made a transaction with the Father. (Yes, the Father is the one to whom Jesus paid his life.) His life, for the life of all mankind. However, the question must be asked, “What made His life worth the life of all mankind?”

Well, I’ll tell you. His life was perfect. He did what you were all supposed to do. He lived and actually fulfilled the entire Law of the Lord. He did not break even the smallest rule. He did everything that He was supposed to do. He didn’t do the things that He wasn’t supposed to do. He fulfilled everything. His life wasn’t just worth the rest of the human race, His life was worth more than all the rest of the human race.

You were nothing. You weren’t worth anything. He however was worth everything. Not just because He was the Son of God, but because He was also the perfect man.

⁴ Luke 2:36-38

When Joseph and Mary took Jesus to be circumcised and presented at the temple that was the first time we see Him being the perfect man. As we read in our text:

*And as all was completed according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, into the city itself of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him.*⁵

Here you hear of Jesus completing the Law for you before He could even talk, walk or otherwise do much of anything. Today, our Gospel is the fulfilment of the Law. By doing this, our Lord showed that He was worthy. He is the One who should and does receive the inheritance of the Father. He is literally the perfect Son.

He redeems humanity. However it's one thing to redeem humanity and another thing to redeem the individual human. Jesus wasn't just concerned about redeeming the human species. He wanted to save you, you as individuals, you as people in and of yourselves. So He gives you ways to come into Him. He gives you gifts that bring you into Him. Those gifts are the Word and Sacraments.

Today, we witnessed Him giving that gift to Katherine. Today, we saw Jesus bring her into Himself. Many people would look at Katie, a young girl, and think, "She won't really be worth anything until she grows up. Not until she can really understand what's going on around her can she be a productive member of society." They would say the same things about those who are still in their mother's womb and the Holy Innocents whose martyrdom we commemorate today.

Jesus however says, "Let the little children come to me."⁶ Jesus cares about every single individual human that has or ever will exist, no matter how old or young they are. Today he showed you that in the Baptism of Katie.

In Baptism, He brings you all into Himself. He takes all of your impurities onto Himself, and purges them in the crucible of the crucifixion. That's why Jesus had to be baptized. When you were baptized, your whole self was brought into Jesus.

⁵ Luke 2:39

⁶ Matt. 19:14 (ESV)

When Jesus was baptized, that's when all those who were baptized were brought into Him. He took your whole self, including your sin, onto Himself and carried you around for three years. Then on the Cross, when He was killed for all the sin that He was carrying, which was all our Sin and none of His, you died, too. And when He was raised on Easter morning, you also were raised because you were still in Him. Even now, you are in Him, even though He is physically in Heaven. So actually you are pulling off being in two places at once. (Have fun with that mind-bender.)

To look at this in another way though, He is also in you. That is the gift that He gives you in Communion. He gives you His body and blood to literally put into yourselves. He makes you to be in Him and He comes to you to be in you.

He also does this through your hearing of the Word. He is, after all, the Word. When you hear the Word, the Word comes into you and, hopefully, abides in you. That is, Jesus Himself comes into you through His Word and lives in you through His Word.

All of this is done to make sure that you as individuals are also redeemed. Because you are in Him and He is in you, you have also fulfilled the Law. That's why Paul can say things like the Law has no power over you anymore. Through Christ and in Christ, you have fulfilled the Law. Because of the gifts that Jesus has given you in His Word, in His Baptism and in His Supper, the Law is now Gospel to you. He did everything in the Law that you had to do, because He knew that you couldn't do it yourselves. You have been redeemed by His blood, washed by His water, and because of that, the Law has no power over you.

Now may the peace which passes all understanding, and which comes from Christ's fulfillment of the Law, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Psalm 89:1-8; 2 Samuel 7:1-16; Galatians 4:1-7; Luke 2:33-40

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Vicar Christopher M. Craig

Soli Deo Gloria