

GOD'S LOVING STEWARDSHIP ON BEHALF OF FALLEN HUMANITY

Hear again the Word of God for this first Sunday after Trinity:

He caused to believe in YHWH and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.¹

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

Today marks the beginning of the Church's long-green season. It is called, Ordinary Time, to help us contrast it in our minds with the majority of the weeks of the first half of the Church Year. The weeks that continue until the Advent of a new year starts are given to us that we might to reflect upon our growth and new life in Christ, represented by the greens of the season. Because of the gifts in talents that God has given to this congregation, we are able to mark the sub-sections of this time with different shades of green. (There is truly no need to have these hues if we don't teach of their meanings, and all that they are given to bring to Christians' memories).

This season's green shifts can be inaugurated as other colors – reds, blues, and whites – help to divide up the major days. The first marker will be upon us on June 24. That day starts St. John-tide, which begins with the Nativity of St. John the Baptizing One. That seasonal subdivision runs until August 10. It has been given to the Church that we might put focus upon the ministry that delivers Christ to His people. This day begins the half-year that can be used to remind us of the Body of Christ that is present among us through God's Word and Sacraments.

In part, due to that, it is not uncommon for congregations to install vicars, deaconess, interns, teachers and pastors during this part of the season of Trinity. God-willing, He will preserve our vicar-elect in his travels, and we will celebrate his induction next Sunday. Then, on the 28th, both our pastors celebrate our ordination anniversaries. Near the mid-point of St. John-tide, Faith Lutheran Church and School plans to witness the ordination and installation of their pastor-elect.

¹ Genesis 15:6.

There are a potential of 18 minor feast, festival and commemoration days given to break up the long-green season. Those we often celebrate during God's Wednesday services amongst us. In reality, as the calendar lines up, this will be one of the shortest green times of the Church we have experienced in a few years. That means we have less time this summer into fall in which we might to reflect upon the life of Christ in the Church than in most years. So, let's get to it!

In today's Gospel text, which is the first of three Sundays every year that hold stewardship themes in the readings, Jesus sets the tone for the Church's time of emphasis in Him coming to His people in Word and Sacraments. Jesus declares the eternal truth that it is essential for members of His Body, the Church, to be hearers of the Word, as He says:

*"If Moses and the prophets they do not continue to hear, even if someone from [the] dead might resurrect, they will not be convinced!"*²

There, in calling a dead self-centered rich man to account for his sins – sins of coveting – of poor stewardship of the many blessings he had in this life Jesus focuses His hearer's attention on the proclamation of Moses and the prophets. We number those in the first five books of the Bible, and the Former and Latter Prophets. They properly consist of 26 books of the Old Covenant writings, as we count them in the New Covenant Church. To make this clear: Jesus is calling His Church, as this season of growth begins, to faithful stewardship of His Word. We are being called to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it so that we might learn anew to trust in God as the Giver of all good and gracious gifts that sustain our bodies and lives. That also means that we are to *be of service to [our neighbor] and help him so that he may keep what is his* (SC, meaning of 9th Commandment). How have you been doing with your stewardship of God's gifts – not just for yourself, but also for your neighbor?

If not as well as you should, turn, and hear how much God truly wills to shower upon you. Believe that God gave the greatest of Gifts, His Son, our Savior, as part of His

² Ibid.

stewardship of all of His creatures. The Epistle reading today that begins the season of growth and new life in Christ speaks of God's action in divine stewardship on behalf of His continually sinning creatures when it declares:

*God remains sacrificial love, and the one remaining in the sacrificial love in God remains, and God in him remains.*³

God, in love, as the True Father (when this secular Father's Day was begun in 1908 and became official in the U.S., in 1972, this part of the Church Year had been in place for centuries), the heavenly Father sent His Son to take on human flesh. In the body, the Son received all our sins – including those of not helping our neighbors keep that which has been entrusted to them. Jesus carried those sins into death that we might not die in them and be found eternally as the rich man in today's parable.

God has freed us, liberated you in Christ, from slavery to sin. He did so that you might live as faithful Abram. When Christ rose from the dead, you were declared right with our Father in heaven. In Moses' time, as the ancient Church recalled God's loving stewardship of fallen humanity, they learned that truth with this narrative:

*[Abram was] caused to believe in YHWH and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*⁴

Keep in mind that Jesus continues to have this proclaimed in the time of green growth and new life in His Church: *they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them!*⁵ Remember, you heard that Jesus declared it necessary for people to hear the words of Moses such as those that declare how he was accounted right with God. Those, you, who are of the Faith, are to believe the Word of God and to live in it. The Word is publicly declared that you might continue to escape the eternal punishment that comes from such unrepentant sins as repeated poor stewardship of this life's gifts for the benefit of our neighbors.

³ 1 John 4:16b.

⁴ Genesis 15:6.

⁵ Luke 16:29.

You who have been faithful stewards of God's Word can recall all the blessings God, on account of His Divine Love and Perfect Nature, showered upon Abram, even before He gave him a new name. You may recall that Abram did nothing, held nothing in himself to deserve those gifts.

If you don't, repent! Will to become a better hearer of God's Word. God knew you would have times of inattention to Him. He knew that you would have times of questioning His Word, as Abram did. That Christ Jesus also bore into the grave in order to bring you forgiveness that is unearned by you.

So, with encouragement to faithful stewardship of God's Word, hear Moses' words, as we reveal anew God's gifts showered upon a Father of the Faith through the first six verses of the 15th chapter of Genesis. This season's declaration of God's showering His grace upon humans begins:

*After these words, came (the) Word of YHWH to Abram in (a) vision to say:
"Fear not, O Abram, I am (a) Shield for you, your reward is caused to be very great."⁶*

Since you are being called to faithful stewardship of God's means of grace as part of His Church, you either know what is meant by the opening, "after these words," or you will look them up later. They were truly fed into many of your ears from this pulpit on Trinity I in the year of our Lord 2013. That dear ones, in manuscript and recorded form, is still available on CLC's website. We have been given some excellent webmasters in this part of the Body of Christ!

This year, we note that there was nothing that Abram did to move the Lord to come to him. It was all God's idea, as part of His Divine plan to bring the Seed of Abram/Abraham into the world. That One would, in love, bear away all the sins of all who by faith are accounted right with God in His blood.

In this waking vision, God the Word came to Abram. As He does when He wills to impart blessing – even when that comes by heavenly angelic messengers – He begins

⁶ Genesis 15:1.

with words we translate: “Fear not!” What other times can you recall a divine message beginning with: “Fear not!”

If you are having trouble recalling, become a better steward of the Word. Therein, for example, you will be led to Gabriel’s Word to Mary. That is declared every year on March 25, three months before St. John-tide begins.

In God’s message of blessing for this day, He declares that He is Abram’s shield. That is a defensive tool that wards off the slings, arrows and fiery darts of not just human foes, but also those of the devil and his minions.

(Ephesians, chapter 6 should come to your Christian minds. If not, repent and become better stewards of the Word. Jesus died to free you to hear it and believe it).

Why would Abram need a shield? After all, he had previously received God’s promises. He had been borne by God through several trials and tribulations to this point in his life.

Well, Abram was fully human. Like you Lutherans, in the midst of all his blessings, he was likely looking for the next shoe to drop. Really, we think, one cannot have all these blessings without some additional struggles! In faithful honesty, we understand that our sinful human nature, or the fallen world, or the devil will turn us to some calamity or another soon enough. So hearing that God was his Shield would bring comfort to faithful Abram as God prepared to shower even more unearned blessings upon him, as He declares, *your reward is caused to be very great.*

Abram displays a very confessional Lutheran response to God’s promise of blessing. He says,

Adonai YHWH, what will you gift to me? For I am continuing childless, and (a) son-heir of my house – he is Eliezer of Damascus.”⁷

Yes, dear ones of the true confession of the Faith, it seems to be a salutary response to cite one’s lack of that which we really want when God grants us His gifts! Look around you... God has given this Church the means to pay off our mortgage. He has,

⁷ Genesis 15:2.

through your stewardship, continued to send workers into His harvest. He granted you the gifts to already have a tithe of that needed to build a new building in which to serve Him to our community. Each of us has all we *need* for this body and life (and if you don't you need to speak with a member of our Diaconate). With all these divine gifts, when you consider His blessings and promises to you, you point out what to Him?

You declare that which you lack, and in that you are just like faithful Abram! Yet, God is true Man enough to take that from Abram, and from you. Recall that Abram said in response to God's promise:

Behold, to me You have not given (the) Seed! And, behold, (a) son of my house is taking possession of (that which is) mine!"

Abram remembered that God had promised to fill the land promised to him with Abram's own descendants. Yet, much time had passed, a lot of life had been lived and Abram was still childless. So Abram whines a bit, as if he had no Father's Day gifts to receive, even though the Father of all had foretold great things for that man. God answers such laments, as Moses records that which we Christians still need to hear:

And behold, (the) Word of YHWH to him said, "Not shall be your heir, this man, rather (the one) which goes out from your inner parts, he will be heir for you."⁸

God was showing that Abram's plans to steward his own inheritance were not God's plans. God made it clear that He was going to bless that doubting Father of the Faith with that which was, in those days, impossible for humans to produce – that is, life from a lifeless womb. Since Abram was declaring his lack of understanding of the Word he heard and saw, God took him to view elements of His creation to illustrate the Promise for him, as the inspired hand of Moses declares:

And He caused to bring him outside, and said to him, "You, cause to look at the heavens and number the stars if you are able to number them." Then He said thus to him, "Thus will be your Seed!"

⁸ Genesis 15:4.

The word translated, “Seed” is singular, and it is capitalized in this manuscript. Abram lifted his eyes to the heavens. There he beheld the multitude of heavenly bodies which were declared by God to symbolize the blessings God willed to shower upon him. In those myriads of stars – which we who live apart from the city lights can still observe – Abram’s future blessings were summed up in a singular Seed.

Fellow believers, Abram was saved from his sinful doubts through hearing the Word of God that declared His coming Seed. That one, Whom you know to be Jesus the Christ, the Son of God and descendant of Abram, was foreshadowed in the wonders of the heavens. He, whose advent was foreshadowed by the stars, was heralded among the nations by a wandering star at His birth. He, though one Person in our flesh, has a body now composed of millions of the faithful from all generations of mankind. What more wonders could be drawn from the image of all the stars summed up in the One Seed promised to Abram?

As you become better stewards of the Word, the Promise, you will discover more. That is what Abram was to learn. Right then, though what was Abram’s repentant response to God’s Promise of the coming Seed from his loins? Moses proclaims:

And he [was] caused to believe in YHWH, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.⁹

God had patiently called Abram away from his doubts concerning His Word. God had moved him to behold the Promise in a new manner. God’s Word had worked the Faith and prepared Abram to receive God’s gifts as one accounted right with God.

God wills to do the same for you. He has called you today, as this green season commences, to grow you into better stewards of His gifts. He has named the greatest of those to be His Word. Through that He has declared the death of His Son for the covering over of all your sins. He has proclaimed the Son’s resurrection to declare you right with him. In Christ, you are free to let these words about Father Abram be true for you: again,

⁹ Genesis 15:6.

in the Body of Christ through Word and Sacraments *[you have been] caused to believe in YHWH, and He reckoned it to [you] as righteousness.*¹⁰

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

Trinity I (*LSB* One-year series)

Genesis 15:1-6; I John 4:16-21; Luke 16:19-31

June 18, 2017

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Soli Deo Gloria

¹⁰ Genesis 15:6.