

***FOLLOWING THE FIRST COMMANDMENT IN THE FAITH***

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

*Ruth said, "Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you; for to that which you go, I will go, and in that which you lodge I will lodge; your people [shall be] my people, and your Elohe [God], my Elohe [God]"<sup>1</sup>*

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

The close of the Ten Commandments (all of which are pictured in our bulletin artwork) reminds Christians that while God threatens to punish everyone and anyone who breaks His Words, He wills to give grace and all blessings to those who hold fast to them. It is a happy consistency that the teachings that have taken place in and around this building this week may also be summarized by that which was chosen for our weekly catechism lesson. We Vacation Bible Schoolers heard about the "Solas," the "Alones" of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation that God still uses to guide His Church in our era. We learned that whenever we try to add the works of the Law – even good works done following the Ten Commands – to our salvation, justification and/or sanctification, we fall short of the glory of God at best, or become "works saints" at worst. When we fall into those traps, we put ourselves in danger of turning ourselves, or our works, into false gods and thus we set ourselves to fall under God's wrath. It is only when we return from such thinking in repentance to God and the gifts He gives – Faith, Grace, Scripture and, the greatest gift, Christ – that we truly give Him all the glory. Such leads us to today's order of service, its hymns, prayers, readings and so on. Take a moment to reflect on that which has been declared, taught, already in today's Service of the Lord.

In the Hymn of Invocation, you called upon God to continue to give you his gifts – of the Holy Spirit, for help in your sins, for daily grace. You sang His Word of baptismal regeneration to remind yourselves that He still gives wonderful gifts to those who have died with Christ and risen to new life in Him. From that, you received God's Holy Forgiveness after you rightly confessed your sins. Then, as those who were renewed by

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ruth* 1:16.

Absolution's returning you to your Baptism, you implored the Lord to hear your prayers, and continue to save you along with all His people, in the Introit Psalm. Then, as one, with the Pastor standing in your stead before the Living God, you prayed the Collect.

That prayer (on the inside page of your bulletin) was composed almost 500 years ago. There, you/we, confessed again our sinful lust and concupiscence. The first part should be clear – it is even pictured in the images of our bulletin cover. The second word was explained here in 2012 on Trinity 6. Since God has joined many of you to this assembly since that time, the word, “concupiscence” may ring a bit unclear. After all, this is not a daily question the majority of Christians ask one another in our mutual consolation of our brothers and sisters in Christ: “How is your struggle with concupiscence going?”

Through the Holy Spirit working through the Word, God gives you spiritual insight and the ministerial use of reason as you remain in Christ. He grants you pastor/teachers who are called to explain spiritual terms. Therefore, hear again that “concupiscence” is a one-word way of saying that our fallen human natures are inclined continually to sin. That is true even for you who have been bought back by the blood of Jesus from the wages of sin – death – and hell itself. Even so, all people, even Christians, are full of concupiscence. That means that the Old Adams that remain in baptized believers still hold strong or abnormal desires and appetites which work at times to tempt us away from the Word which reveals the will of God. The one word in the prayer of the day means that original sin has corrupted our nature, from the moment of our conception, and that we *cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him...* to confess our sins, to walk in newness of life, to do good before God.<sup>2</sup> That is what St. Paul's inspired words testify to when we hear:

*This we continue to know, that our old man was crucified with (Christ), that the body of the sin may be rendered inactive, (that) the sin (would) no longer enslave us.*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Luther, Martin. *Small Catechism*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Romans 6:6*

That means that you, in Christ alone, have been freed in Christ to not always follow your sinful nature. Even so, Old Adam still clings to you. You still have a need to struggle with his inclination to sin. That then leads us to our Old Covenant reading for the day. That temptation to sin was put before a Moabite widow of an Israelite by her well-meaning, pleasant, mother-in-law long ago. Through the Faith, Ruth answered that humanly reasonable and emotionally sound temptation with the following words.

*Ruth said, "Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you; for to that which you go, I will go, and in that which you lodge I will lodge; your people [shall be] my people, and your Elohe [God], my Elohe [God]."*<sup>4</sup>

Ruth's holding to Faith Alone in the One True God meant that the One who would save all people from Adam's sin, their own sins, and, in His death, give them, you, the ability to conquer your/their own concupiscence – inclination to sin – daily that her many great-grandson, Jesus the Christ, the Son of David, son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Boaz and Ruth would be born. The Ruth of today's reading is the Gentile, non-Israelite, many-great grandmother of our Lord. Her many great-grandson, Jesus, is the One about whom you sang before this sermon, as you declared God's grace alone is that which declares you right with God the Father in heaven. For that, you gave Him glory with these words:

*We thank You, Christ: new life is ours, New light, new hope, new strength, new pow'rs. This grace our ev'ry way attend Until we reach our journey's end.*<sup>5</sup>

One only needs such grace from God if one is a sinner. Even sinners who have been bought back from sin – redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ alone – still need God's grace daily. That is why we sing such words.

If you are not struggling with some sin, or sins, daily, beware! If you think you no longer sin in this body of sin, you have no need for Jesus. If you believe you have conquered all sin, and are now living the sinless life on earth – you deceive yourself and

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ruth* 1:16.

<sup>5</sup> Spengler, Lazarus. "All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall," *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 562.

the truth is not in you. You are setting yourself up to fall into the wily clutches of either the world, the devil, and/or your own sinful flesh. Such temptation can come through emotionally sensible, humanly reasonable thinking, like that offered by a pleasant widowed Naomi to her widowed daughters-in-law when she considered the worldly sufferings that would come on them if they were to accompany her to the land of her Israelite ancestors. She was truly thinking of their worldly welfare when she said to Orpah and Ruth:

*Go, you return, each to (the) house of her mother. May YHWH [the LORD] deal mercy in you as that which you have dealt with the dead and with me. May YHWH [the LORD] gift to you (both) and may you find resting place(s), each in (the) house of her husband!*

*Then she kissed them and they lifted up their voices and cried.*<sup>6</sup>

God's permissive will had allowed Elimelech's household to be without male spiritual headship. Naomi was left to be the spiritual matriarch. She, in a role thrust upon her by our old enemy – death – was encouraging her daughters to look out for their own welfare. Worldly realities had pressed in upon that little family in a pagan land.

Naomi followed the kind of thinking and feeling that had moved Eve in her response to spiritual deception, Naomi willed to do that which was pleasing and good to the senses. The text makes it very clear that she truly loved her daughters-in-law, for they had forsaken their families to cleave to their husbands, her sons, men of the Israelite faith. Naomi's pleasant pleading for her son's wives' welfare, her prayer for the Lord's blessing upon them, for all intents and purposes is revealed by the Word of God to be genuine. With the male heads of the family gone, the female fills in the void – for a true household of the Faith is never found to be without those who will attempt to lead in the Faith.

What genuine affection Naomi shares and showers upon her widowed daughters?! Even so, they go on to persist in their desires to remain with her. Orpah and Ruth declare

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ruth* 1:8-9.

their love for her. This the Scripture reveals to be genuine love, honor and respect. As wives of apparently faithful Israelite men – for the text records no condemnation for their dwelling in Moab – they declared their desire to hold to the meaning of the Fourth Commandment.

To their declaring their will to suffer all in following their aptly named mother-in-law, pleasant Naomi then turns to human reason to move them to do that which she, and any reasonable person of that era, would have considered to be best for their welfare. Orpah, follows the word of the household matriarch, and succumbs to the inborn inclination to sin, concupiscence. Naomi, in her efforts to encourage Ruth to do that which anyone would know and feel was best, the pleasant mother, declares what will happen should Ruth follow and care for her own worldly need as Orpah did when she says:

*Behold, has returned, your sister-in-law, to her people and to her elohe [god].  
You return after your sister-in-law!<sup>7</sup>*

Following emotional and logical rationale, God’s command, “Honor your father and your mother,” is lovingly being used to return formerly pagan women away from the One True God. Just as mother Eve was deceived in her spiritual headship, mother-in-law Naomi was deceived – by worldly concerns in genuine human love. These led her, in reality, to tempt her daughter into returning to worship false gods. By God’s grace, through the Faith, in trust in God’s Word, in anticipation of the Christ, Ruth gives God all the glory when she declares:

*Ruth said, “Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you; for to that which you go, I will go, and in that which you lodge I will lodge; your people [shall be] my people, and your Elohe [God], my Elohe [God].”<sup>8</sup>*

Ruth declares the good confession of the Faith. She rejects the loving, though incorrect interpretation of Naomi’s genuine concern and humanly loving response to follow the first and greatest commandment. She begins to fulfill the meaning contained

---

<sup>7</sup> Ruth 1:15.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth 1:16.

in loving the Lord, the God of Israel above all others. Ruth declares that she is willing to hold fast to God's promises for His Old Covenant people. As she does so, she declares that she wills to love her neighbor – Naomi – to whom she is closest by law – as herself.

As Ruth so responds, spiritual headship in that family of two moves from the matriarch to the daughter-in-law who gives all glory to God by proclaiming that she will cling to His promises by grace, through Faith. Her words, and subsequent actions, declare her commitment to the revealed Word of God. She is prepared to suffer all, even death, rather than depart from His promises.

Remember, God will not allow a spiritual vacuum to remain in His households. When one turns from His Word, His promises, His Christ, to follow even the most well-intended, loving, reasonable rational for turning from Him, He raises up others to be faithful. This is true in homes where there is no male headship on account of death – as in those widows' households – as it is in homes where men have abdicated, or never attained, or risen to, fulfilling their God-given roles. As it is clearly shown in today's texts, such are the elements that cause dissension, pain and sorrow in the families of believers.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Christian households in this congregation are under attack at this time. Christian homes in sister congregations locally are suffering dissension, turmoil and pain. All of this and more is on account of the temptations that come first of all from the great deceiver of Eve, and are accompanied by his fallen accomplices – the world and individual's selfish desires, lusts and concupiscence.

This day's text is a call to action in the Faith – in your homes – to be found as faithful Ruth as she led her loving, compassionate, caring, pleasant mother-in-law to follow God's will. The pastors of this congregation are imploring you to pray in your homes for the marriages that are in our household of the Faith. If your marriage is troubled – pray for others who may be suffering the same things. If your marriage has been broken – pray that others would be healed. If death has ripped your household apart, turn to your loving Father, and His household of the Faith, and be led to the One

who died to present you spotless before Him. Pray for the spiritual headship of your pastors – that we be found faithful in our administration of God’s Word and Sacraments.

Know this, Ruth’s words to Naomi are God’s words for you in this place, in this family of the Lord among us God reveals that He intends that: *your people [shall be] my people, and your Elohe [God], my Elohe [God]*. For, in the determination we are given in the Faith, those who are erring among us, even with loving and compassionate reasons, will respond as did Naomi long ago:

*When she saw (that) thus [Ruth] was determined to go with her, she said no more (a) word.<sup>9</sup>*

Thus, ends the day’s reading. But the story of our salvation, your salvation, the preparation for the coming of the Head of the Church is contained in the rest of the book of Ruth. If you cannot recall that which follows, the book of Ruth is only four short chapters long. Maybe today, in your role of head of household, you might exercise your spiritual headship in reading it to all who might be assembled later. Or not... for we all have things to do today that are really important, loving, and compassionate, right?

As for me, and my household, we will follow the Lord!

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

Trinity VI (*Historic One-year series*)

Introit Psalm 28:8-9,1; Psalm 19; Ruth 1:1-18; Romans 6:1-11; Matthew 5:17-26

July 23, 2017

*Pastor Michael H. Morehouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ruth* 1:18.