

FEARING, FOLLOWING, LOVING, AND SERVING GOD WITH ALL YOU ARE

Hear again the Word of God for this 18th Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

And now, O Israel, what does YHWH your Elohe require from you – but to fear the YHWH your Elohe, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the YHWH your Elohe in all your heart and in all your soul...¹

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

Over the past two weeks, you who have been here to receive God's gifts have heard the Word proclaimed concerning endurance in the Faith and the humility of Christ, all of which God gives to those who remain in the Faith. Today, from that, the Word declares that which God says He requires as you humbly endure in the Faith. That is, as our centering text for the day indicates: you are called to fear, follow, love and serve God with all your being. How are you doing in all of that, today, and every day?

If your answer is not, "perfectly," then repent. Turn from such sin. Believe that Jesus perfectly humbled Himself for you, enduring all the wrath of God and pains of sin into death. Jesus rose from the dead to declare you right with the Father. As you remain in Jesus – attached to Jesus through His chosen means of grace in proclaimed and Visible Word – He leads you into fearing, following, loving and serving God with all you are. He grants you His perfect obedience to the Father's will. This you may discover in yourself whenever you might share His love for you with the sojourner (stranger as well as neighbor). The sojourner is whomever God places into your life who needs any form of human care and the Good News of Jesus the Christ. That being summarized, hear again our centering verse:

And now, Israel, what does YHWH your Elohe require from you – but to fear the YHWH your Elohe, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the YHWH your Elohe in all your heart and in all your soul...²

¹ Deuteronomy 10:12.

² Deuteronomy 10:12.

Those words, first spoken then recorded in the 15th century B.C., were to God's Old Covenant people a call to enduring in Him in humble faithfulness. Their meaning was carried over by God, in the Person of Christ Jesus, and through His divinely called Apostles and Evangelists, to God's New Covenant people. For all who have been, are and will be named with God's family Name, there is the same exhortation: *fear the YHWH your Elohe, walk in all His ways, love Him, and serve the YHWH your Elohe in all your heart and in all your soul.*

The first setting in which God gave those His requirements to His people, as most of you will recall, followed God's second giving of the Torah (the Law and Gospel of the Old Covenant). Before God gave them His Torah, they had no righteousness before Him. That is why today's reading begins with, *and now.*

Then, Moses had carried down the second set of Tablets engraved by the finger of God. Those two tablets Moses held in one hand. They were inscribed by God on both sides. (You can see an artist's imagination of that event depicted on the front cover of the bulletin. If you want to know more about the strange things illustrated in that image, ask one of the men who attended yesterday's Bible Study).

The original second set of tablets of the Law would not have been much longer than 44 inches, nor much wider than 26 inches.³ The Tablets under the Cross in our Chancel that displays Christ's death that covers over sins against God's Law would have fit easily into the Ark of the Covenant. Even so, they are likely much larger than the set Moses had to hew from the stone after the first set were destroyed on account of the people's sin.⁴ Out of God's mercy, then, having received a second time, God's Word that would declare them right with Him, the natural question to be raised was: what does God require from all these Words? God asks and answers that query for them, as you have heard it translated:

³ *Exodus* 25:10.

⁴ *Cf. Deuteronomy* 10:1-2; *Deuteronomy* 9:12-17.

And now, Israel, what does YHWH your Elohe require from you – but to fear the YHWH your Elohe, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the YHWH your Elohe in all your heart and in all your soul...⁵

That is a longer way of summing up that which Jesus declared as the first and greatest Commandment when today's Gospel reading was proclaimed. It is a divine explanation of a text from an earlier chapter of Deuteronomy.⁶ Let us pull it apart, and hear its teachings enlarged. We will do so, keeping in mind that we are called to humble endurance in the Faith as the Holy Spirit leads us each and all together to fear, love and trust in God above all things (which teaching comes from where?)⁷

The Word of the Lord requires that His covenantal people – Old and New – fear the Lord our God. A generation or more appears to have heard – whether they were taught it, I do not rightly know – that the fear in this text and parallels was akin to awe.

While awe is a component of that word, the texts in which we are hearing it today direct us to such fear as that which springs from knowledge of one's own unholiness before the Holy God. It is holy fear that moves us to confess as we did this day in the Collect: *We are poor miserable sinners, we know Your will, but cannot fulfill it because of the weakness of our flesh and blood.* That is a fear that comes with the understanding that you and I cannot do, say, or think perfectly that which is always right before God. It is a law-molded fear that moves the faithful to desire to turn from sin that they, you, might walk in the ways of the Lord.

Such fear moves the faithful to look up from the words engraved in stone to behold the Lord's covering them with the blood of His sacrifice. From fear, we are moved by the Good News of the death of Jesus to beseech God to shed His Holy Spirit in our hearts, that we may continue to cling to Christ Jesus in firm faith (That is also in the Collect of the Day).

⁵ Deuteronomy 10:12.

⁶ Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁷ Dr. Luther's Small Catechism, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008, 11.

Look up in the Faith to the atoning sacrifice depicted in our Chancel. Those images remind the faithful of God's shedding His perfect, sinless blood for sinners. That remembrance is declared to move them, to impel you in the center of your being to behold the Cross, and in the Faith of God, bear the crosses laid upon you.

From cross-bearing as you walk in the humble endurance of God's faithfulness – sustained by God in you as you continue to hear of Christ bearing your sins in His sinless flesh on the Cross – you truly learn to love Him. You behold His sacrificial love for you; you receive His love; and, in that unconditional love, you continue to serve Him with your entire being – your body and soul. Just as He did in the Old Covenant, He does in the New. God chooses you, as our text for the day proclaims:

Only in your fathers (did) YHWH set His heart to love (them); and He chose their descendants after them, all of you, from all the peoples for this day.⁸

That was a reminder to those who were first called by covenantal blood-shed to fear, love and trust in God above all others that God chose them. It remains as a reminder to you that God has chosen you in the New Covenant that He sealed in His blood. By faith, in the Faith, God has chosen you hearers of the Word to remember this day that you are the descendants of the faithful of old, elected by God for salvation before He cast down the foundations of this now fallen creation. All this He did for you out of divine love. That He works in you through His faithfulness, in His Faith, for your earthly and eternal benefit. As you remain in God, by the work of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, you are held fast to Jesus the Christ. In His perfect obedience to the Father's will you actually *fear the YHWH your Elohe, walk in all His ways, love Him, and serve the YHWH your Elohe in all your heart and in all your soul...* In Christ, you completely *keep the commandments of YHWH and His statutes which [God] command[ed] you [through eternal words recorded long ago] for your good.*⁹ How then, are you given to know that you are conducting your life while holding on to Christ, and in Him fulfilling the Lord's

⁸ Deuteronomy 10:15.

⁹ Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

requirements for the faithful? You discover that to be true for you whenever you catch yourself engaged in fulfilling the second greatest command, stated in our Old Testament reading in this manner:

Thus all of you love the sojourner, for you all were sojourners in (the) land of Egypt.¹⁰

Whenever you discover yourself freely loving the sojourner – that is biblically defined as anyone whom God brings to you to share the Sabbath rest – you may recognize that you, or rather, Christ in you, is fulfilling that which Jesus defined as the second great commandment in the Law. A sojourner is also thought of as being a person, a foreigner, an “alien” or “immigrant” who has entered a country other than his or her own. A sojourner may also be a neighbor who is not of one’s family bloodlines. “*All of you love the sojourner*” is a call to love any neighbor whom God brings into our lives.

Just so God gave the sojourners from Egypt – the ancient Israelites – His sacrificial love by giving them His Word of promise. That was fulfilled in them through faith in the coming Perfect Sacrifice. So too are we who are sojourners through the wilderness of sin in this fallen world called to share the Good News of the Perfect Sacrifice Who was offered once for all.

Just as the Greatest Commandment was all about humbly enduring in fear, love and trust in God above all others, so the Second Greatest Commandment is fulfilled in fearing, loving and trusting in God to benefit of the sojourners that enter into our lives. That reveals care that goes far beyond simply fulfilling the so-called social gospel – that is simply and freely feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless. Hear how God more fully expresses what it means to care for those who draw near us, to share the Sabbath rest with us:

He does justice for fatherless and the widow, and loves (the) sojourner to give to him bread and clothing.¹¹

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 10:19.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 10:18.

Who is the one doing the justice and the loving in that text? It is God. It is out of His love that you love and serve your neighbor, the stranger, the traveler, the one converting to the Faith, anyone whom God brings into your life.

The Word this day teaches the faithful that we are called to continue sharing with any and all the saving news of the One who perfectly continues to keep the Greatest and Second Greatest Commandments. That means declaring, in word and deed, the unconditional, sacrificial love of God. This we do as we, you, continue to declare His death that covers over sins, and His resurrection that declares the faithful right with the Father. God makes it clear that you who are of the Faith, you who remain in the Faith, are called to participate with Him in the work of the Faith. As you will recall, all of that begins in the faithful as our text proclaims in yet another way:

The YHWH your Elohe you shall fear; Him you shall serve; and to Him you shall cleave; and by His Name you shall swear.¹²

That is another way of saying that which Jesus said when He was tempted, on your behalf, by the Satan.¹³ Since Jesus faced and defeated him in the wilderness, on the cross, and in death, you are freed to fear God by recognizing and confessing your unholiness. You serve God by hearing His Word and serving Him – Christ – to the ones God places in your life. You cleave to Him by hearing His Word in context and receiving His Sacraments worthily. You swear by His Name as you continue to return to His Word and recall that He has, in Holy Baptism, placed His Name upon you. As you are kept in those good things, you are freed to fear, follow, love, and serve God with all your being as you join your confession with that of the Church of all ages:

He (is) your praise, and He (is) your Elohe which has done for you these great and terrible things....¹⁴

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

Trinity XVIII (LSB One-year series)

Introit Psalm 122:1; Deuteronomy 10:12-21; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; Matthew 22:34-46

¹² Deuteronomy 10:20.

¹³ Matthew 4:10 appears to quote Deuteronomy 6:13, which this text further elucidates.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 10:21.

October 15, 2017

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

And now, Israel, what does YHWH your Elohe require from you – but to fear the YHWH your Elohe, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the YHWH your Elohe in all your heart and in all your soul,¹⁵

to keep the commandments of YHWH and His statutes which I command you today for your good?¹⁶

Behold to YHWH your Elohe belong the heavens and (the) heaven of the heavens, the earth and all which is in it.¹⁷

Only in your fathers set YHWH His heart to love (them); and He chose their descendants after them, all of you, from all the peoples for this day.¹⁸

Therefore, circumcise the foreskin of your heart and do not harden your necks any more.¹⁹

For YHWH your Elohim is Elohe of the elohim, and the Adonai of the adonae, the great El, the mighty and the terrible, which does not lift up faces and does not take bribes.²⁰

He does justice for fatherless and the widow, and loves (the) sojourner to give to him bread and clothing.²¹

Thus all of you love the sojourner, for sojourners you all were in (the) land of Egypt.²²

The YHWH your Elohe you shall fear; Him you shall serve; and to Him you shall cleave; and by His Name you shall swear.²³

He (is) your praise, and He (is) your Elohe, which has done for you these great and terrible things which your eyes have seen.²⁴

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 10:12.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 10:13.

¹⁷ Deuteronomy 10:14.

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 10:15.

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 10:16.

²⁰ Deuteronomy 10:17.

²¹ Deuteronomy 10:18.

²² Deuteronomy 10:19.

²³ Deuteronomy 10:20.

²⁴ Deuteronomy 10:21.