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THE GOSPEL**St. Matthew 22:1–14 (NKJV)**

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, ‘See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.’”

But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.

But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

For many are called, but few are chosen.

THE COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord....” (Rev. 14:13). In spite of the great wonders done through Moses, he could not avoid death. He was still a sinner, even though he was a sinner through whom God worked mighty things. Moses died because God’s Word is true and His promises are a clear testimony for all man. One cannot defy God without consequence. “Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’” (Num.20:12).

However, Moses was certainly the Lord’s servant, and He was with him. Moses was not redeemed because of his own righteousness, but because of the Lord’s mercy. The significance of this is shown even more by the fact that no greater servant would come until the Son of God came to manifest the Lord’s mercy. Moses brought the Law of God, but Jesus Christ brought the fulfillment of the Law, and the Gospel of forgiveness, which made Him greater than Moses. He was without sin, so even though He also died according to the promises of God, He laid His life down freely to pay the sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world.

We pray: Lord God, forgive us for our sins, with which we have offended You and justly deserve Your punishment; but keep us according to Your boundless mercy, which You have given us in Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord. Amen.

The Lord kills, and He makes alive. Satan works tirelessly to deprive man of God's Word so that people forget that fact. If man frequently had the Law in front of him he would have a hard time forgetting that our lives are damaged by wickedness. He would have to remember that sin leads to death, whether he likes it or not.

God is righteous. He has done all things well, so, if men die from their sins according to the Word of God's Law, that cannot be counted as evil on God's part. But if Satan can steal the Word from among us, teach men that evil should be embraced as good, and spread the delusion that death has no eternal ramifications, then people truly are in peril.

Christ brings the Word of life and death to the world through His faithful Church. He feeds, teaches, and reminds us so He can also feed, teach, and remind others in the world through us. He makes our lives and words proclaim the fact that He is a righteous judge who has the right to kill, but that He is also a merciful Lord Who makes all who believe alive through the blood of Christ crucified.

God's own Son was killed, and then made alive for the forgiveness of our sins. The Law of God cannot be forgotten or ignored, because man will face eternal death if it is. And the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified cannot be forgotten or ignored, because if it is, man mocks the only means by which he can be made alive.

We pray: Lord God, by Your Spirit make us to always draw near to Your holy Word and confess our transgressions, so that our iniquity may be forgiven in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Much of the Book of Deuteronomy is simply Moses retelling the Israelites what God had told them at Mt. Sinai. In vs. 22 "the Lord spoke to all your assembly...with a loud voice." In vs. 24 the people say, "we heard His voice...we have seen...that God speaks with man; yet he still lives." Then they immediately say, "if we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore, then we shall die." (vs. 25). Their words reveal their, and our, human nature. "We've heard God speak, but we don't want to hear anymore!" If God were anything like you and I, that would have been the end of the road for the Israelites! How lacking in faith, how dumb, could they have been? But fortunately for them and for us, God isn't like that.

The merciful and loving God responds in 6:3-4: "Hear, O Israel." David writes in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And Paul writes, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10:17).

Through God's Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, you and I have been given hearing. We have been given faith and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

We pray: "Blessed Lord, Who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy Holy Word we embrace and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen."

Our text says, “then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.” Moses is telling the people, “God has given you His righteousness, therefore live in it.”

St. Paul picks up on this text in Romans 3 where he writes: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’ But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’” (Rom 3:3-11).

Thanks be to God that in His mercy He has brought us to faith in His Son Jesus Christ and has given us eternal life in Him. Amen.

The purpose of Moses’ song is for people to learn and remember the Word of God. Such is also the purpose of everything the Church is supposed to do. Christ says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you....” (Matt. 28:19-20). Unfortunately, much of modern Christendom has forgotten and ignored the example of our fathers, and the teaching of our Lord. People act as though Christ said, “Go therefore and entertain all nations....” The songs of modern congregations focus less on teaching the faith and more on entertaining itching ears.

Psalms 98: “Oh sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.” The new songs in our age often fail to declare these marvelous things. But the song of Moses was for the very purpose of teaching the generations to come, so that they might hold fast to the Words of the one true God. His song spoke of the profound blessings that came from the Lord to grant them comfort and hope. It also spoke of warnings that were meant to keep them from falling into the sins of faithlessness, which would lead to troubles and destruction.

The salvation and hope of all God’s faithful people do not come from being entertained. They come from the Word of God as it is faithfully learned and practiced among His people. Therefore, may He open our lips that our mouths may always declare His praise with Words of Scripture, in order that we may remember and rejoice in the things God has done in Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Be strong and of good courage...” These words appear several times in today’s reading. And even though they are comforting words, they also mean that trouble is certainly coming. The Lord would not say “Be strong and of good courage” if things were going to be calm and easy!

The life of God’s people is always subject to the evils and troubles that sin brings upon man. There will always be temptation for the faithful, and there will always be persecution from the unfaithful. We will all stumble as we wrestle with our sinful flesh, and many will fall. But the Lord always provides His help and strength to those who cling to His Word. There is no other source of real strength and courage. People can delude themselves with false hopes or prideful strength, but these cannot hold up when faced with death and judgment.

Death and judgment are the worst things any man has to fear. As our Lord Jesus tells us, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28). No one can save himself by his own strength or courage when faced with the consequences of his sins. We can only know strength and courage according to God, Who has overcome our death and condemnation in Jesus Christ’s own death and resurrection. Through faith and hope in God’s own promises and provision we are able to truly stand, even when we know that evils and troubles will surely come.

We pray: Lord God, strengthen and preserve us according to Your holy Word so that we may remain strong in the hope of the everlasting life that we have in Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our text for today God commands that when His people go into the Promised Land they are to destroy all the people and all vestiges of their false worship. He does this because He knows the people will fall away. As God told them, they were a stiff-necked people.

In spite of their hardheartedness He brought them into the Promised Land as He had promised He would. And they did rebel. But God is faithful and He cannot deny His promises to His people, even His faithless people.

In 1 Corinthians 1 St. Paul writes of this faithfulness to the New Testament Church. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Indeed, through Word and Sacrament, our faithful God has brought us into His kingdom and keeps us there.

In faith we pray: Everlasting God, give us the increase of faith, hope, and love, that we may obtain that which You promise and make us to love that which You command; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

One of the themes of Deuteronomy is the trials of the Israelites throughout the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. God reminds His people how He guided, protected, and provided for them throughout the whole journey. He reminds them that in spite of the fact that they were unfaithful, God was always faithful to His promises, and brought them to the Promised Land. God also wants His chosen people to remember Him after they have come into the Promised Land and are settled. He wants them to listen, hear, and follow His words of promise and not to follow their natural sinful inclinations and desire to worship false gods. He says, "Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God to walk in His ways and to fear Him."

In Ephesians 2, St. Paul writes to God's chosen people in the New Testament much the same message. He says, "And you he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sin.... For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

We, too, were enslaved in sin and death, but God came to us in the Word and Baptism, and made us alive. In His Word and the Body and Blood of His supper He strengthens and sustains us to be His faithful people. He then sends us into the world to "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and gave Himself for us...." (Eph 5:2).

Let Thy commandments guide us,
Grant us Thy heav'nly food;
Clothe us in Thy rich garments,
Bought with Thy precious blood. Amen. (TLH 264:4).

"This commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off." Man does not have to chase after strange gods to find meaning or sustenance in life. Nor does he need to climb to Heaven, nor explore the depths. Any efforts to do these things are vain and useless. The Lord has already provided all good things by His Word.

God has done all things necessary to save His faithful people from slavery to sin, death, and the devil. They are blessed simply through the promises of His Word that all has been accomplished for them by His mighty power. The reality of these blessings is as close as their hearts and minds, which are able to cling to these holy Words by the power of His own Spirit at work in them.

The historical events of Israel will always be first and foremost an illustration of the blessings that all nations are offered in Jesus Christ. No one throughout history needs to sell themselves into service of oppressive paganism, or waste his efforts on vain quests for enlightenment or exaltation. The Maker of all things visible and invisible reveals Himself in the simple intimacy of His Words, as they are passed down and faithfully taught by His faithful people to those who will hear. And now that Jesus Christ has fulfilled the promises of those Words, we continue to make known these blessings, which are found only in the holy Name of Jesus Christ, the Crucified.

We pray: Lord, open our lips, that our mouths might always declare the profound blessings that come through your Word, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

It is common for the Lord to use events in time to teach people about His holy eternal things. Today's lesson speaks about how the clothes and sandals of His people did not wear out during their forty years in the wilderness. This wondrous occurrence illustrates the fact that God's promises do not fail. He miraculously shows what Psalm 118 proclaims: "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever."

Even though the sins of man cause trials and difficulties, He does not fail to bless and keep His people. Our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 6, "Therefore do not worry, saying 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'...But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Through faith He clothes us with Christ's righteousness, which will never wear out or pass away. With the gleaming garments of salvation we will enjoy the unending blessings of the resurrection and life everlasting that comes to us through Christ crucified.

We pray: Lord, keep us steadfast in the one true faith so that we may enjoy forever the blessings that You promise to give Your faithful people through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord says to His people, "Hear, O Israel: You are to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself.... It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land.... God drives them out from before you." God makes it clear that the Old Testament Israelites didn't deserve the gifts God gave them.

We New Testament children of God don't deserve the gifts God gives us either. In Romans 3 St. Paul writes, "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all.... As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.... There is no fear of God before their eyes.'"

That is an exact description of us; of our hearts. We are all guilty before God. But Paul goes on to tell us of God's mercy, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Thanks be to God that He has been merciful and made us His people. Amen.

The Lord said to His people: “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast.” At His temptation in Matthew 4 Jesus uses the words of our text against Satan when He says, “Away with you Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” For Jesus these words are the final word. But for Satan there is much more to say. He left Jesus after these words, but he doesn’t leave us alone.

Satan has been successful in his temptation of us. In 1 Peter 5:8 we are told, “your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” When we look at God’s Law we see how successful Satan has been in us. However, through the Word and Baptism we have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ. We have been forgiven. We have been made God’s holy people. We have been given the tools with which to resist Satan’s temptations.

Following his warning about Satan, Peter says, “Resist him, steadfast in the faith.” God has given us His Word and has promised to be our mighty fortress, as Luther’s hymn states:

“Tho’ devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
They shall not overpow’r us.
This world’s prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none,
He’s judged the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.” Amen. (TLH 262:4).

THE GOSPEL**St. Matthew 22:15-22 (NKJV)**

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.”

So they brought Him a denarius.

And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?”

They said to Him, “Caesar’s.”

And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

THE COLLECT

Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Note here that the whitewashed stones, on which all of the law of Moses was written, were set out as an altar on Mt. Ebal. And when all the twelve tribes are assembled on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal to pronounce blessings and curses, it is from Mt. Ebal that the curses come. It is from that mountain where the Law and the sacrifices were that the curses also come. The blessings come from a different place. And all we hear are curses that will fall on the people of Israel if they break the Law.

It is appropriate that we hear curses associated with the law. That is what the law is to us. St. Paul refers to this chapter of Deuteronomy when he says, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." (Gal. 3:10). The law shows us our need. The law drives us to Christ. And instead of curses we receive blessings in Christ. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law." (Gal. 3:13). And so on a different mountain we hear the words "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3). Jesus is our Mt. Gerizim from which blessings come. He fulfills the law of Moses for the Israelites and for us so that we do not need to hear the curses falling upon us. We get to hear the great news of our righteousness in Christ. Let us never forget that the law points us to Jesus.

THE GOSPEL

St. John 4:46–54 (NKJV)

So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine.

And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."

The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"

Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household.

This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

THE COLLECT

Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through Thy protection it may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Twenty—First Sunday after Trinity

Article XX.

Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding Good Works. For their published writings on the Ten Commandments, and others of like import, bear witness that they have taught to good purpose concerning all estates and duties of life, as to what estates of life and what works in every calling be pleasing to God. Concerning these things preachers heretofore taught but little, and urged only childish and needless works, as particular holy days, particular fasts, brotherhoods, pilgrimages, services in honor of saints, the use of rosaries, monasticism, and such like. Since our adversaries have been admonished of these things they are now unlearning them, and do not preach these unprofitable works as heretofore. Besides they begin to mention faith, of which there was heretofore marvellous silence. They teach that we are justified not by works only, but they conjoin faith and works, and say that we are justified by faith and works. This doctrine is more tolerable than the former one, and can afford more consolation than their old doctrine.

Forasmuch, therefore, as the doctrine concerning faith, which ought to be the chief one in the Church, has lain so long unknown, as all must needs grant that there was the deepest silence in their sermons concerning the righteousness of faith, while only the doctrine of works was treated in the churches, our teachers have instructed the churches concerning faith as follows:

First, that our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins, grace and justification, but that we obtain this only by faith, when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been set forth the Mediator and Propitiation [1 Tim. 2:5], in order that the Father may be reconciled through Him. Whoever, therefore, trusts that by works he merits grace, despises the merit and grace of Christ, and seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength, although Christ said of Himself: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" [John 14:6].

This doctrine concerning faith is everywhere treated by Paul [Eph. 2:8]: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works," etc.

And lest anyone should craftily say that a new interpretation of Paul has been devised by us, this entire matter is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers. For Augustine, in many volumes, defends grace and the righteousness of faith, over against the merits of works. And Ambrose, in his *De Vocatione*

FRIDAY, OCT. 24: DEUTERONOMY 25:17—26:19 TRINITY 22

The Israelites were to be a holy people. They would build a country. They would do business. They would farm. They would carry out all the normal functions of a nation, but above all of it, and infusing all of it would be holiness, righteousness, justice. God wanted this society to be different from the Canaanite society which had dominated and corrupted the land. And Israel agreed to follow the law of the Lord, to be not only a people, but God's special, holy people. "Today the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken."

But, of course, Israel did not live up to their promises. They failed on their end. However, God did not fail on His end. He still fulfilled His promises, but ultimately fulfilled them in Christ. St. Paul said, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen". (2 Cor. 1:20). And again he said, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:29). In Christ, we also live as a holy people. A people who go about our normal lives working, playing, and doing all the normal things that people do, but we do all those things *Coram Deo*, before God's face, and for His glory.

These are laws that preserve the community. They preserve the family, the village, the tribe. This society in Deuteronomy was very focused on community. This is certainly different from American individualism, but it is the normal state of human beings. “Little needs to be said about the well-known relevance of ethnicity in the ancient world. Ancients were keenly cognizant of the ‘people’ to which they belonged and the ‘peoples’ that surrounded them.” (Aaron Kuecker). Ancient people were very much part of a collective identity. They were strongly aware that their individual identities were tied to their community identities. “Contemporary Western society is highly individualistic. Most of the societies in the majority world still function as tightly knit communities.... That community gives identity and profoundly influences both attitude and lifestyle. In the stories about Jesus, the surrounding community...is a critical component in all that takes place and its presence must be factored into any interpretive effort.” (Kenneth Bailey).

God cares about communities. God cares about us individually and our salvation is possessed individually, but God cares very much for our communities. He makes laws here to preserve the healthy functioning of communities. Healthy communities produce healthy individuals. No man has a purely individual identity. He finds his individual identity in relation to others. When others are taught to be just, kind, faithful and good, he also finds those attributes strengthened in himself when he identifies with such a group. Our Lord wants us to build up good, just and faithful societies so that we might pass on such virtues to the next generation of children.

Gentium, and elsewhere, teaches to like effect. For in his *De Vocatione Gentium* he says as follows: “Redemption by the Blood of Christ would become of little value, neither would the preeminence of man’s works be superseded by the mercy of God, if justification, which is wrought through grace, were due to the merits going before, so as to be, not the free gift of a donor, but the reward due to a laborer.”

But, although this doctrine is despised by the inexperienced, nevertheless, God-fearing and anxious consciences find by experience that it brings the greatest consolation, because consciences cannot be pacified through any works, but only by faith, when they are sure that, for Christ’s sake, they have a gracious God. As Paul teaches [Rom. 5:11]: “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” This whole doctrine is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience; neither can it be understood apart from that conflict. Therefore inexperienced and profane men judge ill concerning this matter, who dream that Christian righteousness is nothing but the civil righteousness of natural reason.

Heretofore consciences were plagued with the doctrine of works, nor did they hear any consolation from the Gospel. Some persons were driven by conscience into the desert, into monasteries, hoping there to merit grace by a monastic life. Some also devised other works whereby to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins. There was very great need to treat of and renew this doctrine of faith in Christ, to the end that anxious consciences should not be without consolation, but that they might know that grace and forgiveness of sins and justification are apprehended by faith in Christ.

Men are also admonished that here the term “faith” doth not signify merely the knowledge of the history, such as in the ungodly and in the devil, but signifieth a faith which believes, not merely the history, but also the effect of the history—namely, this article of the forgiveness of sins, to wit, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins, through Christ.

Now he that knoweth that he has a Father reconciled to him through Christ, since he truly knows God, knows also that God careth for him, and calls upon God; in a word, he is not without God, as the heathen. For devils and the ungodly are not able to believe this article of the forgiveness of sins. Hence, they hate God as an enemy; call not upon Him; and expect no good from Him. Augustine also admonishes his readers concerning the word “faith,” and teaches that the term “faith” is accepted in the Scriptures, not for knowledge such as in the ungodly, but for confidence which consoles and encourages the terrified mind.

Furthermore, it is taught on our part, that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should trust to merit grace by them, but because it is the will of God.

—The Augsburg Confession, §1–27

MONDAY, OCTOBER 13: DEUTERONOMY 11:26-12:12 TRINITY 21

This week's devotions from Deuteronomy are a continuation of a discourse of Moses as he is about to leave this world and the Israelites are finally getting ready for their entrance and possession of the land promised to their father Abraham many centuries before. So what does the Lord God have to say to the people of Israel? He offers blessings and curses. The blessings are for the people of the Lord God who believe His promises and follow Him diligently. The curses are for the unbelieving people of Canaan who have ignored His existence and have chased after other gods since before the time of Abraham.

What does the Lord say? "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree." In other words, all false worship and idolatry should be utterly destroyed and removed from their midst. Not only so that it will not become a stumbling block and temptation to His people, but because this destruction is God's judgment against Canaan for their unbelief. This was the curse from God against those who do not believe in Him.

However, the Israelites, those who put their faith in God, receive the blessing. "But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide." The blessing is that they can continue to worship the God Who grants them all the promises He made to them.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22: DEUTERONOMY 21:1-23 TRINITY 22

The law of Moses is very concerned with death, that is, unlawful death as well as all unlawful activities. Unlawfulness is sin. It is rebellion against God's way of life. It is rebellion against God Himself. God takes rebellion very seriously. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

All murder must be atoned for in God's eyes. But for man to carry out the right punishment for murder, he must know who is guilty. Sometimes this is not possible, but atonement must still be made for this sin, so that it does not rest upon the whole people. The slaying of the heifer wasn't exactly like an expiatory sacrifice, "but, as the mode of death, viz. breaking the neck...clearly shows, it was a symbolical infliction of the punishment that should have been borne by the murderer, upon the animal which was substituted for him. To be able to take the guilt upon itself and bear it, the animal was to be in the full and undiminished possession of its vital powers." (Carl Friedrich Keil).

If we extend this fact infinitely we see that our Jesus not only had to be in the full and undiminished possession of His vital powers, He had to be perfect in order to bear the weight of the entire world's sins. One would not think of a Lamb as a powerful animal, but our Lamb has all the strength necessary to bear your sins, and all the world's sins.

This chapter in Deuteronomy is one of the places Christians cite in their argument against women in combat. There is a distinction between men and women. In God's created order, He designed women to bear and nurture new life. This is an essential aspect of female identity and vocation; God created women as complementary to men, not interchangeable with men. God, in the Bible, repeatedly treats women as equal in value to men, but very different in identity and function. For example, God commands the Israelites to make a distinction between enemy men and women in Deuteronomy 20:12-15. Men may be put to the sword, but the women and the "little ones" were to be spared, thus establishing different categories for men and women in warfare.

Our Lord Jesus Christ confirms such principles here in Deuteronomy and upholds the order of creation. For example, just as Jesus gave up His Life and died for His Bride, so also husbands should give up their lives and die for their wives. (Eph. 5:25). From Deuteronomy 22:5, the blessed Dr. Martin Luther concludes: "A woman shall not bear the weapons of a man, nor shall a man wear female clothing....[S]uch things are not to be done as a matter of serious and constant habit and custom, but due uprightness and dignity are to be preserved for each sex....Through this law...[Moses] seems to reproach any nation in which this custom is observed." (*Lectures on Deuteronomy*, AE 9:219-220). Men and women live in the greatest happiness when they live in harmony with the functions God has created for them.

The Lord God demands to be worshiped in a specific way and at a specific place. We see after the division of the two kingdoms into North and South that a "sin" is committed by the first king of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam. What is his sin? He established places to go and sacrifice to God that were not in Jerusalem, where God chose to establish His Name and be worshiped. Now, the question could be posed, "What does it matter as long as God is being worshiped?"

The answer to that question is given by the Lord, "You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods." The point is that when people's worship is left to their own heart's desire they end up doing what is hateful to the Lord, for just as our hearts are corrupted with sin, our worship becomes corrupt.

This is shown by the Israelites, who forsook the true worship of the Lord and continued the abominations of the surrounding nations. The same is true of those who corrupt the liturgy. When the pure Word of God in the liturgy is watered down or changed, what God wishes to impart through His Word in the liturgy is replaced with what man wishes to convey. And since the promises of man are as fleeting as he is, his worship crumbles into sensationalism and emotionalism.

But, true worship of God is as eternal and unchanging as He is. His worship imparts the Holy Ghost through the means of grace employed in the liturgy, and He creates faith in His promises through His true and unchanging Word.

The theme of today's pericope is that false prophets and false preachers should be marked and avoided. This is of such importance to the Lord God that in today's reading our Lord commands the Israelites that those who entice anyone to worship another god are to be stoned until they are dead. Speaking falsehoods about God and leading people astray from the truth of God's Word is a serious matter to the Lord.

When we know false teaching exists we should not ignore it. First, we should seek clarification, for perhaps either we misunderstood, or the preacher did a poor job of explaining himself. As Moses says, "Then you shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently." We should never haphazardly go around accusing preachers of false doctrine.

However, if false doctrine is discovered and the false preacher refuses to recant, we should not say, "Well, nobody is perfect," or "Well, there is no perfect church body." Remember, the Lord views this matter so severely that He required death in the Old Testament. He still views this as a serious matter. So what are we to do? We are to mark and avoid false preachers, and if we find ourselves in a corrupt, heterodox church body which refuses to change, then we need to stop our ears to the preacher and use our feet to leave that church body.

This goes back to what Moses said in our text at the beginning of the week about blessings and curses. To hear false preaching leads us into being cursed by God, but remaining steadfast and faithful to the pure preaching of God's Word gives us all the blessings our God has promised us.

The "avenger of blood" in this passage is the nearest relative of the murdered person. It was his job to redeem the blood of his kinsman with the blood of his murderer. Justice was the re-balancing of the scales. One man's blood to pay for another man's blood. This is a tribal system of justice. It is a very natural type of system. All men have a tendency to favor family and close kin. This is the very basis of tribal society and it is built right into our genetics. God's system of justice is based off of this foundation as well. Sin must be atoned for with blood. So, tribal systems of justice are not wrong, are not totally primitive, and they persist even in our day.

In fact, Francis Fukuyama, argues that "the tribal system is strong,...that even in most modern states it never fully disappears." In modern societies, institutions of government like court systems, police forces and legislative bodies put several layers of buffer between offenders and victims. They are meant to keep blood vengeance from spinning out of control. God here also institutes cities of refuge to meet some of the same functions. They were a means of stopping blood feuds for accidental deaths (manslaughter). God does not negate the tribal system of justice. If a man is truly guilty of murder, the avenger of blood will still exact his price from the murderer, but God sets limits and brings a layer of control to this system. And with this system God teaches all men their need for atonement and redemption.

THE GOSPEL

St. Matthew 18:23–35 (NKJV)

Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, “Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.”

Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, “Pay me what you owe!”

So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.” And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?”

And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

THE COLLECT

O God, our Refuge and Strength, who art the Author of all godliness, be ready, we beseech Thee, to hear the devout prayers of Thy Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Again we hear that we are blessed of God: “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” Believers in Christ, being the spiritual Israel, have this same promise; we are a chosen people. God chose from before the foundations of the world to redeem mankind from sin, death, and the devil. Those who believe in this promise, having been gifted with faith by the Holy Ghost through the means of grace, God has elected to be His chosen people.

A chosen people show their thanks to God. We give of what He has given us to support the work of the Church, but we also give of what our Lord gave to us to help our neighbors: the ministers, the orphans, the widows, the poor, and the people we do not know. All this is done to give thanks to God for our redemption from sin, death, and devil. “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you.” We were in bondage to sin, death, and the devil, but our Lord God redeemed us. He bought us with His innocent suffering and death that we may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17: DEUTERONOMY 15:19-16:22 TRINITY 21

There were three feasts that required the Israelites to come every year with an offering: the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, of Weeks, and of Tabernacles. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was the celebration and remembrance of Passover, when the Lord God delivered Israel out of the bonds of slavery in Egypt. The Feast of Weeks was the observance of Pentecost, which was when the first fruits of the beginning of the harvest were offered to the Lord with prayer. The Feast of Tabernacles was the feast when the Israelites would give thanks to God for a successful end of harvest.

All of these feasts also have a spiritual significance. The Passover was a foreshadowing of our Lord's suffering and death on behalf of the people. The Israelites were to bring a firstborn male lamb without defect to be offered to the Lord. Our Lord Jesus was the true Passover Lamb who, without blemish or defect of sin, was sacrificed for the atonement of the whole world and the justification of those who believe on Him.

Pentecost was the thanksgiving of the first fruits, and spiritually this became the thanksgiving of the first fruits of the Apostles, who were blessed by the Holy Ghost on that day and 3,000 souls became the first fruits of the New Testament Church. Pentecost is the beginning of the harvest of souls.

The final feast is a foreshadowing of the Last Day when the whole world will be called to gather their sheaves (their works) and come before the judgment seat of the Lord God. It is the end of the harvest of souls. Unbelievers will perish because their works will not save them, but those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved because they trust in His works and His sacrifice for them.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18: DEUTERONOMY 17:1-20 TRINITY 21

There are some sinners who need to be removed from our midst. It is those sinners who are unrepentant and continue in their wickedness, and even consider the commandments of God irrelevant. Yes, God forgives, but He does not ignore impenitence. There is no such thing as universal justification in the Holy Scriptures. We are all sinners, but we are not all repentant sinners. A repentant sinner also possesses faith in a merciful God who will have mercy on him. A repentant sinner is sorry for his sin, and desires to live a more God-pleasing life. He does not desire to continue in his sin, thinking that God is going to forgive him anyway, and that anyone who corrects his sin is wrong for judging him.

The reason why such people must be removed from the Church is that, first, they are a cancer to the rest of the souls within the Church, and if the cancer is not removed, the rest of the body is infected. The rest of the people either start engaging in the same sin, or come to believe such behavior is not a sin. Second, that person must be removed for his own good, so that he comes to realize the seriousness of his sin and, by God's grace, come to repentance. Third, he must be removed so that we also might be led to daily repentance of our own sins, so that we might by daily contrition and repentance drown the Old Adam and each day arise as a new creation before our Lord Christ.