

Sermon Trinity 18 2021

October 3, 2021

Matthew 22:34-46

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's clear in those words of Paul's greeting to the church in Corinth, just as it's clear in abundance throughout the Scriptures that our faith in the Lord Jesus is a calling. But there's more. There is this calling to be saints, to be holy ones; a calling discussed in the Old Testament lesson: **"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good."**

As Jesus speaks in the Gospel lesson today, it rings of something similar, doesn't it? Sure the question to Jesus isn't framed in the specific phrase of a calling, but when God commands something, what is that but Him calling us to do it? And what is the greatest commandment? **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."** Now, as we hear that call from the Lord to love Him with all of our hearts and with all of our souls and with all of our minds and to love our neighbors as ourselves, we have to understand that Jesus here is pulling from the Old Testament. He didn't just pull these out of thin air in His authority as God in the flesh. No, they were already laid out in the Law, the Torah. He pulled them from the books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Actually, these came specifically from Deuteronomy 6:5, and Leviticus 19:19, but hopefully you're getting my point. These are commands that had been laid out well before the birth of Jesus. And so we see in them that they connect with this calling that Paul describes about being saints. These commands connect to our Lord's call to holiness. We see also that as the Lord calls us to walk in His ways and serve Him that serving Him includes this command to love Him and the command to love our neighbors.

As I was reading about this call this week I found something that I thought was a great description, in particular, a description about loving God. The article I was reading

about talked about love, because after all that's a term we throw around a lot and it can become quite unclear just what we mean when we talk about love. And so the article made the point with this call to love God what it is. It said, *"To love God is to exist for Him as a slave for his lord (cf. Lk 17:7 ff.). It is to listen faithfully and obediently to His orders, to place oneself under His lordship, to value above all else the realisation of this lordship (cf. Mt 6:33). It also means, however, to base one's whole being on God, to cling to Him with unreserved confidence, to leave with Him all care or final responsibility, to live by His hand. It is to hate and despise all that does not serve God nor come from Him, to break with all other ties, to cut away all that hinders (Mt 5:29 f.), to snap all bonds except that which binds to God alone."* Now, that's a lot so I want to break it down a bit.

To love God means that we see our entire existence as being for His purpose. Now, to be clear as the Bible describes that purpose, we can understand that to be first and foremost to be loved by God. But even still as He has loved us, then we are drawn to life in Him. That life exists totally for His purpose, like a slave lives for the work of its owner. In that we are to listen to His every command and order in obedience. We are to place ourselves under His lordship. Now as I say that, on the one hand that continues in this same line focused on duty and action, but in another it also means that we are to live under the care and provision of this Lord as He desires that we would have it. So, that means that we are called to cling to Him in unreserved faith, trusting in every promise He makes to us. And in this, as Jesus says elsewhere, we must understand that we are not to have two masters. As we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, this love loves Him above all things, and doesn't cling to the things of this world with its pleasures.

In fact, as I often make the connection, we can understand how to do this by looking at the Ten Commandments. I haven't encouraged you all in a while, but make sure you know them by heart. Know them, not just vaguely, but know the numbers and the order. And meditate on them in light of Luther's explanations in the Small Catechism. As you do your reading of your daily devotions, meditate and pray those commandments. You can do one at a time and repeat them every ten days, or do a couple at a time. Or you can pray those all on Monday, then pray each of the chief parts of the Catechism the next five days and come to church on Sunday. But no matter how you do it, memorize the commands. Know that Commandments 1-3 tell you how to love God by not having other gods (by not fearing, loving, or trusting in other things above Him), by not misusing His Name (by living according to His Word and calling upon that Name into which you were baptized with prayer and praise), and by remembering to

keep the Sabbath Holy (by not despising the Word in your daily lives or by despising the preaching of that Word in the Divine Service—and to be clear despising includes not doing). Remember that those teach you how to love God.

Then also love your neighbor. This too is your calling. Love them by honoring those in authority under and above you, by helping your neighbor in their physical needs, by honoring marriage, by not stealing, by not bearing false witness, and by not coveting. This is your calling. Live according to those commandments.

In fact, listen to how Luther speaks of this. He says, *“Therefore, this is what the law requires and says: You owe nothing except to love Christ and your neighbor; otherwise you are eternally condemned. But then afterwards Christ comes and says: I suffered, died, and rose again in order that I might fill you with the riches and grace of my Holy Spirit and thus strengthen you. So if you have the Spirit, then you are not an outward spirit; no, you have salvation. Then a person thinks this way: Now, Lord Jesus, I will serve you, die and live for you, and patiently suffer all that is disagreeable from you and from men; do with me as you will. That person will be washed of his sins by the blood of Christ.*

As you hear that, do you hear what Luther does? He basically says that on the one hand everything I have just said as it is grounded in God’s commands comes and tells you what you must do and if you don’t do it then you will be condemned. And I think we all know that burden when the Law comes and shows us the conviction of our sins, when we hear it, then think, “but I haven’t done that.” And perhaps as I’ve been saying all that I have said so far about this calling that we have as Christians, you thought that too. But look again at how Luther makes the connection to Jesus in this: *“then afterwards Christ comes and says: I suffered, died, and rose again in order that I might fill you with the riches and grace of my Holy Spirit and thus strengthen you.”*

He comes and He tells you that this is something you do, however imperfectly, but you do it by His strengthening of you. You do it, not so that you’ll earn heaven, but you do it in the new life in Him.

If I could come back to make a connection to this in Gospel, it’s interesting that there is this questioning of Jesus that goes on. You see the lawyer come and “question” Jesus “to test” Him. Now, that word for questioning there can be a questioning for examination, like even that which would be in a court. This is the same when Jesus questions them in return. There’s an examination going on. And you see in it that Jesus passes, but the others are shut up and unable to respond. The Lord Jesus knows that

should we stand in examination before God, we too would be shut up, muzzled like animals with no ability to justify our actions. And so, He has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets for us. As He says, **“On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets,”** He understands that this call to love is the thing upon which all of this depends, literally hangs. And so He put Himself under that command, that Law, to show what it really looked like. And that love most of all showed forth in the cross for sin. It showed forth in the One who took sin upon Himself in place of the broken and fallen sinner who hasn't loved God with all of his heart, soul, and mind, and who hasn't loved his neighbor as himself, and He carried that sin bearing its burden in love. And this is what He has done for you.

And because He has done that, He now strengthens you in that love in this life. As we think of that, a concluding thought in light of this: as the Old Testament lesson speaks of that call to be the people of God, the people chosen by Him, it calls for a circumcision of the heart. It says: **“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.”** Now, I'm guessing you've likely heard the connection to the imagery of circumcision, that as the Israelites were circumcised, this gave a picture of them cutting off their flesh, their sinfulness. And the point was that this actual cutting off of flesh from their body represented this image of what should happen to their hearts. And yet in the New Testament, Paul says that as you were baptized you circumcised with the circumcision without hands. In that water with the Word, the Lord Jesus cut off your sinful flesh. As you have been unable to love Him and love your neighbor, you've been given new life, new strength in those waters to do it. His death on the tree won the forgiveness for you, His resurrection brought new life to you, and He bestowed that upon you in those waters.

As you hear that call and that command, then, know that you're right when it pangs your conscience. You're right when you hear it and know you haven't done it. But know that He strengthens you to go forth in it. Know that He won't leave you or forsake you in that work. Know that He has begun the good work in you, and He will bring it to completion. Rest in this calling then Christians, because you are His holy ones by His work for you. Amen.