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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25A)

October 29, 2017

Text: Matthew 22:34–46

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Normally, we'd be commemorating the Festival of the Reformation during this morning worship service. It has long been our congregation's tradition to remember and give thanks for the work of Martin Luther and our other 16th century forefathers in the faith on the Sunday closest to October 31st; that's the day conveniently set aside by historians as the beginning of that momentous event called the Protestant Reformation. We should remember this great event that began 500 years ago this year. But not this morning. Come back this afternoon to celebrate our Lord Jesus' love and grace in hymn, music, liturgy, preaching and sacrament.

This morning's gospel text presents before us an important Biblical doctrine that was restored in its fullness back to the Church during the 16th century Reformation: the proper distinction between God's Law and God's gospel. This doctrine is a foundational bulwark for all theology. Our Lutheran Confessions have this to say about Law and Gospel,

“The distinction between the Law and the Gospel is a particularly brilliant light. It serves the purpose of rightly dividing God's Word and properly explaining and understanding the Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles. We must guard this distinction with special care, so that these two doctrines may not be mixed with each other, or a law be made out of the Gospel. When that happens, Christ's merit is hidden and troubled consciences are robbed of comfort, which they otherwise have in the Holy Gospel when it is preached genuinely and purely” (FC V:1; *Reader's Edition*, p. 552).

Today's text from Matthew 22 sets before us this godly distinction between Law and Gospel. By God's grace, we will take special care so that we hear each according to their distinctive purposes. Most especially, we pray that God's Gospel will comfort our troubled consciences, allay our fears, and strengthen our hearts and minds with Christ's merit of righteousness and salvation unto eternal life.

According to today's reading, a lawyer tested Jesus by asking Him "which is the great command in the Law?" (vs. 36). In vs. 37–40, Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy 6:6 and Leviticus 19:18, "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."

God's Law is summarized in these verses. Love God and love your neighbor.

God's Law tells us how we are to live as God's creatures; it reveals where we have failed to keep God's Word and will; it reveals God's anger and righteous judgment against every form of sin and evil. For today, however, we will focus primarily on what God's Law says about how we are to live.

Jesus says you are to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. In other words, loving God is the orientation of our heart, soul, and mind toward Him. Everything about us is to be directed toward God in love. Our heart, that is, our emotions and feelings, that which we long for and desire. Our soul, that is, our spiritual being, that which makes us different from everyone else. Our mind, that is, with our intellect and everything that our intellect controls such as decisions, actions of the body, and even our emotions to a large extent. Dear saints, you are to love God with your body and soul, mind and emotions, any and everything that makes you you.

But even in our love toward God, we must be guided by God's Law especially as written in Commandments 1–3. We love God by worshiping Him only, calling upon His name in every trouble and offering every form of godly praise, and by honoring His sacred Word. In and through these things, we love God with heart, soul, and mind.

Maybe you're starting to feel a bit uneasy with the demands of God's Law. Can I honestly say that I have loved God with all my heart, all my soul, and with all my mind? That I have loved God with everything I am and ever hope to be? That every passion, every action and thought, every whim is purposely and joyously directed toward God? Certainly not.

But the Law hasn't finish instructing us. Not only are you to love God, in the way and manner He describes – heart, soul, and mind, but you are to love your neighbor as yourself (vs. 39). In fact, you cannot love God without loving your neighbor. For the command to love your neighbor is like unto the first, says the Lord Jesus. To love God

is to love your neighbor – with heart, soul, and mind, in the midst of all his or her many and various needs. Martin Luther, in a sermon he preached in 1532, boldly and provocatively asserts that when we serve and love our neighbor, as described in Commandments 4–10, we are already in heaven. For by serving our neighbor in love, we are loving God as He wishes to be loved. Listen to Luther, “Consequently, we are making for ourselves a paradise and heaven here on earth when we are obedient to God and serve our neighbor. But when we disobey God and do not serve our neighbor, we make earth a hell for ourselves; for we are serving the devil who belongs in hell” (House Postils, v. 7, p. 56).

This is the first point of today’s text. To love God and to love our neighbor. And that love is manifested in very concrete and real ways. For where love is ruling and reigning in the heart, it compels the body to move in ways that show love, not for itself and its own desires, but for the good and benefit of others, those outside ourselves (family, friends, neighbors, strangers, even our enemies, slanderers and persecutors). You and I are called to live that kind of life, to live according to God’s Law. “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Thank goodness Jesus asks a question of the Pharisees for it will lead to God’s Gospel. Jesus asks, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” The Pharisees answer correctly, “The son of David” (vs. 42). But their answer is incomplete. Jesus continues (vs. 43), “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord,” (for David himself prays in Psalm 110:1) ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet?’”

The Christ is the Son of David. A true human king by His natural, royal lineage. But the Christ is also much more. He is the Lord to whom David also prays. The Christ is none other than the Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity, who shares with the Father the same essence, nature, majesty and glory. The Lord Jesus is teaching us that He is the natural Son of David and also David’s eternal Lord. Jesus is our Christ who came to this earth to do battle with the enemies of sin, Satan, and death. He came to fulfill God’s holy Law and save sinners unto eternal glory. Christ Jesus alone loves God the Father with all His heart, soul, and mind and His neighbor – the whole world and all its human inhabitants – as Himself. Jesus, Son of God and Son of David, is the fulfillment of the Law and our Savior unto eternal life.

This is the Gospel, that doctrine which cannot be made into a new Law lest sinners lose hope for a clean conscience and a joyful eternity. What you and I could not do

but is required by God's Law, Jesus, the Christ, does for us. We must know the Law with all of its demands and requirements. But we must also know the Gospel, the eternal doctrine that says sinners like you and me are freely justified and forgiven for Christ's sake through faith without their strength, merits, works, and law-keeping (AC IV). Whereas the Law teaches you what you are to do and not do in obedience to God's will, the Gospel teaches you what Christ the Lord has done and continues to do to save you, forgive you, and make you His own dear child for all eternity. In today's Scripture reading, the Lord Jesus does not direct our attention to commandment keeping or any kind of good works. Rather, Jesus directs us to who He is and what He does on our behalf.

The Law of loving the Lord God with all your heart, soul, and mind and your neighbor as yourself reveals that we cannot hope to have a right standing before God based upon our own righteousness. We cannot fulfill the Law because we are conceived and born in sin. It is a false, misleading dream to think that we can stand justified before God on our own merits and strengths.

But the Lord Christ, Son of David and Son of the God the Father, came to help us. He took upon Himself our sins and failure, our inability to keep the Law, and He overcame sin, failure, death, Satan, and every form of evil on your behalf. He says to you and me, I desire to be your Lord and Master. I am the one says, Jesus, who rules and reigns over all creation from the Father's right hand for your good, for your present and eternal life. To the Law must be added the Gospel, the doctrine that Jesus, the beloved Son of God the Father and King David, loves us sinners with perfect love.

Remember dear saints of God, the distinction between God's Law and God's Gospel is a particularly brilliant light that illumines all of Holy Scripture. The Law guides us as Christians through this temporal life; it teaches us what to do and not do, which estates are ordained by God. But the Gospel guides us to eternal life, how to escape sin and death, and so be saved (Luther, p. 68-69). So long as we have the light of God's Law and God's Gospel, we can face all trials and struggles with unfading hope. For our Lord Jesus rules and reigns on our behalf and for our eternal benefit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.