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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

October 8, 2023

Text: Deuteronomy 10:12-21; Matthew 22:34–46

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

God's Old Testament people were preparing to enter into the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering in the desert. Before they crossed the Jordan River, Moses taught them again the ways of their God. The entire book of Deuteronomy is the retelling of God's Word for His people; the "second" law. Deuteronomy is not a different law but the same law spoken again on the cusp of their entrance into the Promised Land. Today's portion from Deuteronomy 10:12–13 begins with a question, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you...for your good?"

Two things must be noted here before we consider the details. I want to start with the end of the question. What God requires of us is for our good according to the end of Deuteronomy 10:13. The Lord God created each one of us uniquely in our mother's womb. Even though each of us represents a special creation of God, irreplaceable, precious, and marvelous, we share a common purpose. Every man, woman, and child was created to know God and to have fellowship with Him. The fullest, richest human life is one lived in faith and love toward God. Anything less than knowing God the Father through Christ His Son by the ministry of Holy Spirit is human diminishment. Human flourishing, the fullest life one can live begins, continues, and ends with knowing God the Holy Trinity in faith and love.

This, in part, informs our desire to share the Gospel of new life, faith, and love with everyone we meet but most especially our family, friends, neighbors, and anyone the Lord brings into our lives. The goal of Christian evangelism and witnessing is so that people can know God through faith in Jesus and have the fullest possible life lived in fellowship with Him.

The “good life” is knowing God. That’s the first thing I want to emphasize and affirm today. God gives His Word to us and reveals His will for our lives for our good.

The second thing I want to highlight is the requirements God has placed upon us. Remember, these requirements are not for His good but our good. To live according to His requirements is to participate in the good life He wishes to give us as His beloved and redeemed people. Five requirements are listed for us in Deuteronomy 10:12–13. You might grab your bulletin/insert so that you can see them and hear them again:

1. To fear the Lord your God,
2. To walk in all His ways,
3. To love him,
4. To serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,
5. And to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord,

And then notice the ending of vs. 13, “...which I am commanding you today for your good?”. Entire sermons and in-depth Bible studies could be given on each of these five requirements. For today’s purposes, I want to provide some basic highlights on what each of those five requirements mean for us as New Testament Christians. For these requirements also apply to us. Christ the Lord came down from heaven to be incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in order to save us from sin and Satan. For the devil seeks to diminish our lives through sin and disobedience leading to eternal death. The devil wants to destroy the full and good life God created us to know and experience. Only the perfect life of Christ Jesus, His bitter suffering and death, and His resurrection from the dead can release us from sin’s bondage. Or to say it differently, only through knowing the crucified and resurrected Christ Jesus by faith, can we live according to God’s requirements and participate in the good life He intends for us. Without Christ Jesus, we cannot fear God, walk in His ways, love him, serve Him with our heart and soul, or keep His commandments.

To fear God means to hold Him in wondrous awe and to revere Him with the deepest respect. All that we are, the life we live, the good things we receive and enjoy, come from His loving hand. God is good and His steadfast love endures forever. Therefore, we fear Him with awe and wonder.

But fearing God also means being afraid of His wrath poured out against sin. Every sin in thought, word, and deed – big, little, and everything in between, is subject to His righteous wrath and eternal judgment. We ought to fear His wrath and not do anything against His will.

The second requirement is “to walk in His ways.” As Christians, we order our lives according to God’s ways, not the devil’s, not the world, not even our own human reason. To walk in the ways of the devil is to be enslaved to sin and ultimately to death. We live in this world that God created for our good. But we don’t live according to worldly standards which are contrary to God’s word and will. That’s what the Bible means by “the world.” The ideas, practices, cultures assumptions, and so forth which are contrary to the rule and reign of God. Here are some quick examples: If the world tells us that unborn children are not fully human and therefore can be legitimately aborted, we say no. The same is true about marriage. If the world says marriage can be the union of two people of the same-sex, or the union of more than two people, and so forth, we say no. If the world says God the Trinity cannot be discussed in education, in politics, or the various expression of public, civic life, we say no. We will walk in His ways in all of life: at home, at church, and in the world.

The third requirement is “to love Him.” As I said earlier, this is the heart of the matter. All of God’s law and will is summarized and fulfilled with love, love for God and love for man. But to understand this requirement, we need to know what the Bible means by love. It’s far more than strong emotions or human passions. That’s what the world says, wrongly and tragically.

Love consists of two aspects. First, it is the will to seek the good of the beloved. Second, love desires to be in fellowship with the beloved. In other

words, love is an outward orientation that wills to do good and desires the good for the beloved. So, love looks away from itself, the lover, and does all things for the good of the beloved. It encompasses our will, mind, and emotions. But love orients them (i.e., mind, will, emotions) toward the good of the beloved rather than to itself.

I trust you can see that this two-fold definition of love perfectly describes God. For God is love. He does all things for the good of His beloved people and He desires to be in loving relationship with His people. The highest and perfect demonstration of divine love is seen in Christ Jesus in His death and resurrection. He willingly and joyously came to this earth to live, suffer, and die for the good of His creation. “God loves you” which means His will is oriented toward your good. And He desires that you be in perfect, loving fellowship with Him. In other words, the perfect love and fellowship the Father has with the Son and the Holy Spirit – the divine love between the members of the Holy Trinity – is the love God wants you know as well.

We Christians receive this perfect love through faith in Christ Jesus. And we respond in love seeking to glory God in every part of our lives, body and soul, mind and heart, will and emotions. Everything is directed towards Him with the goal that we might know Him fully and completely.

The fourth requirement is “to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” This requirement makes explicit what I said a few moments ago. Serving God must be with our whole person. There is no area in our lives, no aspect, no hidden realm where God is not served first and foremost. There is nothing in our lives where we can say, “God, you have no say here; this belongs exclusively to me.” Our entire lives belong to Him, body and soul.

The fifth requirement is “to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord.” This too makes explicit what I have been saying all along. The good life is lived according to God’s commandments, not man’s. Thus, we fear God, walk in His ways, love and serve Him (requirements 1-4), according to

His commands. These commands are revealed us in the Bible, the word of God. As New Testament Christians, we live according to God's revealed will. Christ Jesus has redeemed us by His precious blood so that we are no longer under the law's condemnation. That is the glorious truth of Gospel. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Through Christ, we are set free from judgment and death for our sins are forgiven. Such is the glorious liberty of the Christian faith. As Christians, we love God above all things ever as we walk according to His commandments through faith in Jesus.

The Lord Jesus summarized all that I have been preaching today in Matthew 22:40, part of today's gospel reading, "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." The two commandments are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. And to love our neighbor as ourselves. God created us in love to know and experience His love. And that love is experienced and known in loving Him through faith in Christ Jesus and loving one another in Christ's name. This is God's good and gracious will for our lives. The requirements are for our good. Christ Jesus did everything in love for us and for His heavenly Father. We don't earn God's love. We receive it through faith in Christ. And then live in His love for all eternity. You are the beloved of the Lord. Redeemed by Christ Jesus. Live in His love knowing for this kind of life you were created, redeemed by Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

✠ 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.