

Sermon for May 31, 2015 – Holy Trinity / Graduation

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NKJV)

**Theme: Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul and strength!**

- 1) Meditate on His unique essence, power and mercy.
- 2) Keep His Word in your head, heart, hands and lips.

*<sup>4</sup> “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

As Israel stood at the border of the promised land, ready to start their new life in Canaan, Moses reminded them of the covenant they made with the LORD at Sinai. He knew how prone they were to stray from their God. This is why He took time to remind Israel of the LORD’s faithfulness. Remembering and confessing God’s mercy every moment of every day would prevent them from falling for the temptations that would entice them in their new home.

Graduates, you stand ready to cross into a new era of your life. God knows how severely the world will tempt you to give up your faith. You might think that you are strong, but you are not. None of us are. We are all like sheep – prone to stray from our good Shepherd. We easily give up and give into temptation. Why? Because we don’t spend enough time meditating on our God and His gracious work for us.

This is why it is important for all of us to listen to Moses' encouragement to: **Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul and strength!** *1) Meditate on His unique essence, power and mercy. 2) Keep His Word in your head, heart, hands and lips.*

**Part One:** Meditate on His unique essence, power and mercy

As I mentioned, our sermon text is part of a speech Moses gave the Israelites as they stood ready to enter the Promised Land. Having reminded God’s people of the covenant the LORD made with them at Sinai, Moses encourages them to keep God’s Commandments as they promised. Why? Because of who the LORD is, what He has done and what He promised to continue to do to deliver them.

And so Moses says: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!*

At first glance this little sentence might not seem all that revealing or important. Jesus, however, didn’t feel this way. When asked what the most important commandment of all was, Jesus answered: *"The first of all the commandments is: `Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. `And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’* (Mark 12:29-30 NKJV)

For millennia orthodox Jews have recited this text as a creed – confessing their faith in who the LORD is and their allegiance to Him.

Understand, then, that the statement, “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*” is pregnant with meaning. Moses is saying: “Listen all of you who claim allegiance to the one true God: This LORD, our God, is unique in every sense of the word! Take this truth to heart, making Him and His Word the foundation of your life.”

Who, exactly, is the LORD? He is a God unlike any other god – first of all because no other God exists except He alone – and also because of the way He reveals himself in the Bible.

And how does the LORD reveal himself to us in sacred Scripture? As triune: that is 3 distinct and separate persons and yet one in being and essence. We will confess this truth in the Athanasian creed after the sermon. This revelation of who the LORD is certainly defies all human logic and explanation! It is a teaching that no one can ever understand, but that simply must be believed in childlike faith because this is how the LORD, our God, reveals himself in the Bible.

The LORD – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – is our one, true God. He is the creator of all that exists – seen and unseen. The whole universe belongs to him and submits to his commands. He alone is totally free to do anything and everything. He alone creates and destroys, gives life and takes it away. There is not a place too small for him to be, or beyond his reach. And yet He fills the universe, knows all and controls all.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is God – unrivaled in majesty, righteousness and power and, most importantly, He is unmatched in mercy. Listen to how the LORD described himself to Moses: “*The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.*” (Exodus 34:6-7 NKJV)

The LORD is unique in mercy. Yes, He is just: punishing sin and chastising the children of those who hate him so that they might take note and repent. But He is also merciful – so much so that He sent His only Son to save us. The LORD is so gracious that He took on human flesh and blood in order to live the perfect life we all failed to live so as to win the righteousness we need to live in His eternal presence. Having done this, He took all our sins upon himself in order to suffer and die in payment for them all. Because of His gracious work, we stand forgiven.

But the LORD’s unique mercy doesn’t end there. Just as the LORD chose and rescued Israel from its slavery to Egypt, so the LORD chose and rescued each of us from our slavery to sin, death and the power of the devil by means of His Word and Sacraments. In Baptism He made a special, personal covenant with each one of you where He promised to be your God – forgiving all your sins. Just think you are God’s dearly loved child, chosen in Christ Jesus from before the creation of the world to believe in and belong to Him.

And the LORD is faithful to all his promises. Nothing can ever separate us from His love. The only way we can become separated from our LORD is if we, like the prodigal son, choose to leave our heavenly Father through unrepentant sin and unbelief. May the LORD keep us from such a fate!

The LORD commands: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.* Because of who He is and all that He has done to save us, the LORD wants us to love him as our God. This means willingly putting Him first in our hearts and minds that every decision we make is based on the wonderful relationship we have with Him. It means that every moment of every day we are thinking of Him, loving Him and living for Him.

Sadly we are far too selfish and corrupt with sin to ever keep this commandment the way God desires. As Luther says: “No saint could fulfill [these words] if God did not forgive.” Like toddlers learning to walk but constantly falling, we want to run to our heavenly Father, but can’t. Thankfully the LORD’s forgiving love picks us up and brings us where we need to be. As a parent rejoices over the imperfect picture a child works hard at out of love, so the LORD rejoices over the love we express towards Him – forgiving our every imperfection. So great is His mercy!

Part Two: Keep His Word in your head, heart, hands and lips.

But the world will do all it can to divert our attention from our gracious LORD. Our own sinful natures will work hard at making us bored with God’s Word. Why? Because they are in league with the devil who wants to ruin both us and our children. This axis of evil wants nothing less than our damnation! They know that if they can get us to abandon the Word, they can easily pry us away from Christ!

This is exactly why the LORD wants us to take His Word to heart. This doesn’t mean merely saying: “Yup, God’s commands are good – people should really follow them. Yup, God’s Word is good – when I get the time I will read it some day.” No! To take God’s Word to heart is to have it as our daily food and water – without which we can’t live. Keeping God’s Word in our hearts means taking every opportunity we can to grow in faith through worship and Bible study. It means not only knowing the 10 commandments but also (in the peace of Christ’s forgiveness) living according to them – expressing our fear, love and trust in the LORD above all things.

The LORD says: “*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.*”<sup>7</sup> *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*<sup>8</sup> *You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*<sup>9</sup> *You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Understand that when the LORD encourages us to bind his words on our foreheads and hands, He is not saying that we should literally put boxes containing His Word on those places like the Jews misinterpreted these words to mean. No, rather the LORD wants His Word to be so much a part of us that He is always on our minds, in our hearts, on our lips and seen in what we do with our hands.

So let me ask you: is the LORD always in your hearts, hands and lips? Parents: do you teach your children about the LORD as diligently as you should? Do you talk to your children more about the LORD, his creation and salvation than you do about hunting, fishing, the Packers or the Badgers? Do your children see how important the LORD is to you in your words and actions: how He is your God whom you love and worship above all else? You see, they don’t need you to send them to Sunday school and Church, they need you to bring them. They need you to tell them about His love and salvation. They need you to impress upon them how important it is to remain in the Word – and let me tell you, they can tell when you are faking it! You can never teach your children the importance of the Gospel if it isn’t important to you!

But let’s not only address parents, what about the rest of us? What do the people of this world see when they look at us? Do they see God’s love expressed by our hands? Do they hear His call to repentance expressed by our behavior? Do they hear His saving Gospel in the words that flow from our mouths? And if not, why not?

Again, it is certainly impossible for any of us to live as we ought. Without God’s forgiving grace we would all be lost. But the LORD is merciful! Let us then repent of our sins – begging our gracious God

for forgiveness. And, as we look to him in repentance and faith, the LORD will most certainly forgive us. Not only that, He will send us His Spirit to help us study His Word to make it so much a part of us that we can't help but share it in our Words and actions.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: the graduates are not the only ones standing at a border – ready to enter a new stage of life. We all are. Every day is a new day that brings with it new hopes and dreams as well as new challenges and temptations. The world is a dangerous place – not only for our graduates, but for all of us as well! Let us not end up like the majority of Israel who took such pride in themselves that they neglected God's word and soon abandoned the LORD for all the vain things the world offered. No, by the grace of God let us heed Moses encouragement to: **Love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul and strength!** How? First of all by meditating on who He is and the lengths to which He went to save us from our sins. Then let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us keep His Word in our head, heart, hands and lips so that we remain partakers and sharers of His wonderful love – always looking forward to the amazing glory and salvation that will be ours when He comes again at the end of time. Amen.