

Sermon for September 9, 2012-15th Sunday after Pentecost

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Theme: Listen to God

- 1) *Don't change a word He says*
- 2) *Understand the blessings of doing what He says*
- 3) *Proclaim it to your children.*

"And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you. . . ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? ⁹ "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children. (ESV)

The Israelites gathered around 120 year old Moses for an important speech just east of the Jordan River. 40 years earlier they camped at a similar place, when the LORD told them to be bold and take the land He was giving them. But the people didn't obey. As a result, God condemned that generation to 40 years in the desert – to wander around until a new generation arose who would listen to Him.

During their desert wandering the Israelites learned that God's serious about his Word. God promised to preserve them, and preserve them he did: Desert rocks provided water, bread fell from heaven, flocks of birds flew in to be eaten, clothes did not wear out and powerful nations were scared of Israel because of God was with His people.

But Israel also learned God is serious about his Word the hard way. The desert was littered with the bodies of Israelites who rebelled against God's commands - who sought pleasure from created things rather than listening to their Creator. God was so serious about his commands that when Moses – out sheer frustration – failed to do what God commanded him, the LORD told him that he would not be allowed to enter Canaan.

And so there old Moses stood - at the edge of Canaan – ready instruct this people, who were so prone to straying, one final time. What did he say? That which he preached his whole life: listen to God. **Listen to God:** *Don't change a word He says. Understand the blessings of doing what He commands. Proclaim His Word to your children.*

Part One: Don't change a word He says.

The words Moses spoke to Israel have great meaning for us too. Why? Because they proclaim the Lord's desire for His people, whom we are through faith in Christ Jesus. And we, like the Israelites, are prone to stray from God's instruction.

Our sermon text begins: *And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them.* What were these statutes and rules? Everything the Lord said to the Israelites regarding their relationship with him and their neighbors (such as the Ten Commandments, the civil and ceremonial laws) and – most importantly – everything the LORD promised concerning the Messiah. The Israelites were to take God's Word seriously. And why? *"That you may live. . ."* What God said to the Israelites also applies to us: we listen to God so that we might live. Only God can give life, and He does it through his Word.

All humans have a problem: we are born enemies of God because we are born in sin. Flesh gives birth to flesh – Jesus says (John 3:6). Everyone’s foremost natural desire is to serve self and not God. We all are spiritually dead – separated from LORD – and in danger of eternal death in hell.

But God does not want mankind dead. This is why He sent His Son in to the world – to win salvation for us by living the perfect life we all failed to live, and by suffering the punishment we all deserved. Through faith in Jesus' work we receive forgiveness for all our sins. Through faith in Jesus' Word, we are declared righteous, raised to spiritual life and given the gift of eternal life. God’s Word is precious. This is why He says through Moses: ² *You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you. . .*

God is extremely jealous of His word. In the book of Revelation, He says: *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.* (Revelation 22:18-19 ESV)

How do people add to God’s Word? Sometimes, in an attempt to be pious, people add rules where there are no rules. Some people will say that if you don’t tithe you are not a Christian. Others will say that drinking any alcohol is a sin, that you cannot eat certain meats at certain times of the year, or that you have to do something in order to assist in your salvation. St. Paul calls such pious sounding laws: *“doctrines of demons.”* (1Timothy 4:1 NKJV)

People subtract from God’s Word when they claim sin is no longer sin. Think of the acceptance of things like homosexuality or sex before marriage. People subtract from God’s Word when they say things like: “It doesn’t matter whether or not you believe in a six day creation, what matters is that you get the moral of what the creation account is trying to teach you about God.” But when you question the validity of some of God's Word, you end up questioning all of it.

We Lutherans are not immune to the temptation of adding or subtracting from God’s Word. We are tempted to guilt people into supporting and serving the Church, or make rules where God’s Word grants freedom. We are tempted to subtract from God’s Word by twisting the Gospel into a license to sin and be selfish. “I’ve been baptized and confirmed. God promises to forgive me, so I’m not worried how I live.” Do you know who else didn’t worry about their life and used their relationship with God as an excuse to sin? The Israelites who bodies were scattered in the desert! They used their blood-bought relationship with God to sin, and look at where it led them.

Be careful, not to add or subtract to God’s Word. It is perfect and complete. Its purpose is to reveal his Son to you that you might believe and live.

Part Two: Understand the blessings of doing what He says

The LORD saved us for the same purpose He chose and delivered the Israelites: that the people of this world *may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16 ESV)

The Lord says through Moses: *Keep [my statutes and decrees] and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'* ⁷ *For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?* ⁸ *And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?*

We, God's people, are certainly blessed. The Lord revealed himself to us, saved us and has given commandments that are meant to preserve and protect our life on this earth. Every commandment of God is a way we can show true love to Him and our fellow man.

The people of this world might laugh at us for our faith in Christ – calling us old fashioned idiots – but no one can claim that God’s commandments are bad thing. Loving our neighbor by not stealing, gossiping or hurting them; loving our spouses by being faithful to them; honoring our parents and others in authority; avoiding materialism through coveting; and – most importantly – staying close to God by truly trusting and loving him above all things: these are all wonderful blessings meant to protect and prosper us. And as we faithfully follow God’s will, we stand out in the world. We are blessed. And why? Because our gracious God is near. He use all things we experience – both good and bad – for our eternal good. His whole purpose for us is that we let our lights shine by listening to Him.

How near is God to us? The LORD says through St. Paul: *do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?* (1Corinthians 6:19 NKJV) Yes, God is very near us! This is both a frightening and wonderful thought. Frightening because of our sins. We all know how much and often we fall. And yet, the LORD is willing to forgive our sins as we turn to him in repentance and faith. Knowing God’s forgiving love towards us makes the knowledge of his presence a wonderful blessing. God knows what is going on in our lives. He cares. He will guard and guide us through everything by means of His Word.

Part Three: Proclaim it to your children.

Our text concludes: *"Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children,*

Take care of your soul by keeping yourself in God's Word. A lot of people foolishly think: “I went to Christian school and confirmation – I know all the basics that have been drilled into me. I don’t have to worry.” Let me tell you a sad little secret: there are a lot of people in hell who went to a Christian schools Why are they there? Because they did not continue in what they learned. They became complacent and forgot. Consider the Israelites: They experienced God in a way none of us could even begin to imagine. And yet, many fell away. Why? Because they weren't careful to listen to and live God's Word.

Listen and study God's Word. Teach it to your children and grandchildren. Pass it on to the next generations. And why? First of all out of love for them, that they too might be saved. And secondly for yourself. Do you know that the best way to learn is to teach? That’s right – the more you teach God’s Word to your children and grandchildren, the more you will grow in faith. And what a blessing it is that God has provided you with dedicated men and women who are willing to assist you by teaching Sunday school. Support them and their work with your prayers, encouragement, and making sure both you and your children come here to learn.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: **Listen to God.** *Don't change a word He says. Understand the blessings of doing what He says. Proclaim His Word to your children. Amen.*