

Second Sunday after Pentecost – June 18, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church
Pastor Charles Heup

Deuteronomy 11:18-21,26-28

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19) Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20) Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, 21) so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth ... **See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse-- 27) the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; 28) the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. (Click -->)**

Friends in Christ:

You probably are familiar with the movie classic the Wizard of OZ. In the movie, Dorothy dreams that she has been blown away to the land of OZ – in an attempt to find her way back home to Kansas she's told to follow the yellow brick road with the hope that the wizard of OZ could help her. **(Click -->)** Along the way she encounters the tin man, the cowardly lion and the scare crow – each of whom joins her on the journey to the wizard because she has told them that he might be able to help them. And so they all journey together hoping to be able to live happily ever after. **(Click -->)**

Unfortunately, in real life; there is no yellow brick road for us to follow – but there are many different paths that people try follow as they travel through life. But there is only one path that leads to the promised land. The words of our text were spoken by Moses to the people of Israel as they neared the end of the journey to the land which the Lord has promised to give them. Moses was encouraging them to be a people of the Word – following the commands and clinging to the promises the Lord had given to them. **(Click -->)**

Of course, the Lord hasn't promised us an earthly land of promise – but he has provided us with a Savior who made it possible for us to look forward to a heavenly land of promise. And as we journey through this life to the promised land of heaven it's important for us to be a people of the Word – following the commands and clinging to the promises the Lord has given to us. Through our text Moses encourages us to: **(Click -->)**

Theme: Stay on the Road to the Promised Land

1. Study the Word
2. Share the Word
3. Live the Word

The Holy Spirit has placed us on the road to the Promised Land by calling us to faith in Jesus. I suppose that there is the danger that someone could mistakenly conclude that once they have been placed on the path to eternal life that now it would all be up to them to make sure that they stayed on the straight and narrow. But that is not the case. The Lord promises to be with us and to enable us to remain faithful (to stay on the road).

We can't stay on the road by ourselves. We need the continued grace of God and the power of his Spirit. We receive that through the *Means of Grace* – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. When we separate ourselves from that power source, Satan is ready to draw us away from God and his blessings. The Devil daily entices us to follow other gods that are not true. Moses wanted the Israelites to know that too. He wanted them to know that if they veered away from the Lord and his gracious life-giving Word that the result would be disaster and the Lord's curse.

We know from the rest of OT history that sadly, God's people frequently wandered off the path he had chosen for them. They neglected the Word. Sometimes the Lord saw fit to use many troubles to call his people back to him and his Word when they did wander. At the same time, of course, the OT Scriptures are filled with examples of the Lord's undeserved compassion and mercy through which the Lord reassured his people again and again that his promises would never fail. Those promises allowed those who believed them – the remnant – to see every trouble and difficulty as loving discipline, meant to direct them to the compassionate, merciful promises of their God.

We have those same compassionate, merciful promises. In spite of our constant sinful wandering and our many doubts, the Lord has placed his threatened curse upon Jesus. In spite of the fact that we are born sinful and destined to death the Lord has placed into our hearts and minds a faith that clings to his sinless life and innocent death as our sure hope for admission into the heavenly land of life once we have crossed over the earthly river of death.

It is evident from our text that the saving work of our Lord is meant to have significance for our everyday life. It's not just something extra we think about in life but it is everything we think about in life. Everything else in life only has meaning when it is considered in the light of what our Lord says about it. Our text encourages us to study the Word with these words: **Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.**

The actual Hebrew words that Moses used talked about planting (or fixing) the Lord's words in our hearts and minds and then tying them on our hands and foreheads. Maybe some of you have done some planting recently – you've carefully placed the seeds or plants into the soil and gently covered them with soil so that they could take root and grow. You are hoping of course that the plants will flourish so you can either enjoy their beautiful flowers or the vegetables which they will produce. The seed is planted in the ground but the flowers or fruit are found hanging from the branches.

That's the idea behind Moses' words. Moses was telling the people that the Lord wanted them to go about their lives as if the beauty of his Words were hanging from their hands and foreheads, because that Word had been firmly planted in their hearts and minds. The only way this will happen is by a regular study of that word so we can receive the warnings and comforts it offers. Make the Word an everyday part of your lives. Read it and think about on a daily basis. A simple devotional booklet like the Meditations might be just the place to start if you are not already in the habit of using the word on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, the Pharisees of Jesus' day misunderstood the words of our text – they really tied little boxes to their arms and the hats that they wore on their foreheads. Inside the boxes were four Bible verses – one of which was taken from this section of Scripture. Thankfully we know that God wants us to study his word, to believe what we hear him say in that word and then to live according to that word. What the Lord expects of us is to decorate our lives with the evidence of his grace to us.

At times, you and I also find ourselves neglecting the Word or misusing it. It's important to see the sinful tendencies we have in our own hearts. Then when we see in Scripture the hands of our Lord Jesus stretched out on the cross and see his willingness to follow his heavenly Father's will we'll find the power and the reason to show and share the love of Christ in our lives. Our study of the Word will lead us to share the Word.

Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Here again the emphasis is on an everyday practical use of the Word as the parents shared that Word with their children in everyday normal situations. Moses didn't

want God's instructions to be something that was just head knowledge, something that was used only one day a week or something that had no meaning for their so-called regular lives. Moses want the Lord's commands and promises to direct and guide them every step of the way in their routine experiences – in their leisure time, their travel time, their sleeping time and their getting up time.

As we continue to look at this text, we discover some more verses which the Israelites often took quite literally. **Write [my words] on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, 21) so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.** Many Jews would actually place little boxes of Bible verses (called mezuzahs) on the doorframes of their houses. The boxes really served a twofold purpose. As the family would come and go they were reminded that the word of the Lord was to go with them. Others in the community would see the mezuzah either as they passed by or came to visit and in this way the Jews would be able to remind others of the wonderful truths of God's word.

We might have a similar custom actually – perhaps in your home you have a cross, or a Christian picture, or some other form of art work that portrays something from the Scriptures. Surely, they can serve as reminders of the Lord and his commands and promises as you go about your daily activities. They can even remind others who enter our homes of the Lord and his blessings. Of course, these kinds of symbols often are taken for granted or become showy. Many who aren't even Christians like them – because they are pretty.

Moses point wasn't that we are to put up symbols but his point was that we are to find ways to remind ourselves that God isn't just an abstract idea – he's a real and personal being who will be with us wherever we go. Now if we're taking the Lord with us wherever we go – it's quite natural that we'll be talking about the Lord wherever we go. That means we'll be sharing the Word and its comforts, encouragements, promises and also its commands and values with others. Most likely this will take place as a natural part of our conversations and activities. When we are sharing the Word in our homes and with our families it will seem quite natural to do the same with others whom we meet – maybe a simple thing like a saying good bye to some one and adding the thought may the Lord bless you or be with you. Maybe just an offer to pray with someone or for someone. Or maybe it's reminding someone of what Jesus has done for them or telling them about some of God's promises which would be especially meaningful to them because of a situation in their lives.

As Moses reminded the people to be a people of the Word he also shared with them the Lord's promise of blessing – the Lord would bless them with many days in the land of promise. This promise was evidence of the Lord's grace for them and for their children. God always treats believers with grace – but sometimes it seems to us that the Lord doesn't quite count our days the same way we do. He promises long life to those who are obedient to parents – but we are aware of situations where a young infant or child or teenager or young adult have been taken away through death.

In conjunction with this two thoughts are important. 1) No matter how many days the Lord determines are the right number for us, we can be certain that parents obeying God by teaching the Word to their children and children obeying parents by listening to the word is a godly recipe for a happy (not perfect) but happy life. Here's the second thought: God always has a purpose in mind when he calls someone out of this life. Here's a promise for you to plant in your heart and mind and to tie on your hands and bind on your foreheads: (Isaiah 57:1) **The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.**

When you have a promise like that tucked away in heart and mind, you'll have the opportunity to share it with others I'm sure. Such promises also encourage us to live the Word. Moses reminded the people of the Lord's blessings and curses in our text.

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse-- 27) the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; 28) the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.

Moses wanted to stress the fact that the Lord was serious about his commands as well as his promises. There would be blessings for those who took the Lord at his word and followed his commands. There would also be trouble for those who turned away from the Lord by following the then unknown gods of the heathen people who lived in the land which the Lord would give to them.

The Lord's blessings and curses still apply today. But it's important that we apply these words in a proper fashion. It's all too easy for us to become motivated to follow the Lord so that we'll enjoy success and avoid his wrath. We figure the harder I work at doing what he commands the more successful I'll be. All of a sudden the emphasis is on what we do. We end thinking that God owes us something for our actions. Of course, that thinking is not in keeping with what God has told us in his Word. He word tells us that he owes us nothing but that he freely gives us his blessings for the sake of his Son, Jesus.

We apply these words properly then we see in them yet another evidence of the Lord's underserved love and grace – another wonderful and undeserved promise of our Lord for us to cling to, believe in, and share.

Living according to the word isn't just a matter of following a set of rules – even unbelievers often do that. It's more a matter of clinging to the Lord's promises and giving him thanks for all he has done for us. Luther's explanation to the first commandment gets to the heart of the matter: We should fear, love and trust in God about all things. That's really what it means to live according to the Word. The Word will guide our actions, comfort our fears, remove our tears and fill us with hope and confidence which will find expression in our day to day activities and lives.

There's no yellow brick road for us to follow, the road which you normally take to get to church may be under construction, you may even get lost as you enjoy your summer travels but with the Lord's help you'll be able to Stay on the Road to the Promised Land. That help will come to us through the Word so this summer be sure to Study the Word, to Share the Word and to Live the Word. Amen.