

**Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – July 10, 2016**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Deuteronomy 30:9-14 (NIV)**

Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. **The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous**, just as he delighted in your ancestors, 10) if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 11) Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12) It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 13) Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 14) No, **the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.**

Dear children of God,

One time someone asked Jesus what the greatest commandment in the Law was. He responded by saying: (Matthew 22:37 NIV) **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** In the Old Testament Lesson today Moses essentially said the same thing when he encouraged the people to obey the Lord God and keep his commands.

**Turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.** That command demands our love. I think most of us would agree that it's impossible to demand that someone love you. As a young high school student, there were many young girls whom I thought I loved – trouble was none of them loved me back. You can't just demand that someone love you. As parents, we can't simply demand that our children love us – rather we love our children and that in turn leads them to love us. So why does our heavenly Father demand that we love him? Doesn't he know that it is impossible for us to do this? Has he forgotten that we are by nature sinful and that our sinful mind is hostile to God?

Of course not! The apostle John who declared: (1 John 4:10 NIV) **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** Then after reminding us of God's forgiving love for us he wrote: (1 John 5:3 NIV) **This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...**

God's love for us changes things. Just as our love for our children motivates their love for us, so the forgiveness that is ours for Christ sake changes our way of thinking about God. Our new man wants to love God and no longer regards his commands as being a burden. Our text for today encourages us and reminds us of why God says:

**Love the Lord with all your heart** because

- 1. He delights in you and desires to bless you**
- 2. He puts his Word into your hearts and desires your faithfulness**

As I mentioned previously it was God's chosen leader Moses who first spoke the words of our text. He had been privileged to lead the children of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt to the edge of the land God had promised to give to them. When they arrived, the people rebelled against the Lord God again and refused to believe that he would allow them to take possession of the land. The Lord God threatened to destroy them all on the spot but Moses interceded for the people. (Numbers 14:19-23 NIV) **In accordance with your great**

love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." 20) The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. 21) Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, 22) not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times-- 23) not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. Only Joshua and Caleb who had encouraged the people to trust in the Lord would be able to enter that land and live in it.

And so for 40 years Moses lead the people of Israel as a tribe of nomads as one by one the people who had left Egypt with him died in the wilderness. Finally, the time had come for Moses to turn over his position of leadership to Joshua whom God would use to lead his people into the land of promise. In our text, Moses is addressing God's people for the last time as their leader. As he does so, he reminds them of the Lord's unchanging faithfulness to his promises. He assures them that the Lord will always be with them. He even tells them that the Lord will enable them to love him in spite of their sinful hearts: (Deuteronomy 30:6 NIV) **The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.**

Moses is not demanding the impossible when he says in our text, **"Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers..."**

Moses was reminding the people that the Lord delights in them and desires to bless them. These blessings are evidence of his grace. He provides them with eternal and physical blessings in his grace. The blessings are rewards of grace given by God to those who are faithful and follow his decrees. Sadly, many take these promises of blessing and try to turn them into a formula for success even as they ignore God's grace. They tell people, "do this, and you will be blessed." They are promoting a form of works righteousness -- suggesting that we can earn God's favor and blessings. It's a dangerous theory; one that ultimately leads to despair. Here's why.

At times God allows poverty and hardship to enter into the lives of his children – even those who are faithful and zealous for the Lord. We might think of Job or the Apostle Paul as examples. Can you imagine the disappointment those who feel that they are earning prosperity and blessings from the Lord by their faithfulness to him must feel when the Lord allows these difficulties to enter their lives. They may see their lack of prosperity as evidence that God doesn't love them. They end up trying more and more and more and eventually they may mistakenly conclude that God has been unfaithful to them.

Let's not fall into the trap then of thinking that God's commands are a formula for success. His commands serve primarily to show us our sins, pointing to a need for repentance. Then secondarily those commands show us how to respond to God's gracious forgiveness.

As we hear these words we are first of all reminded that we have not always loved the Lord with our whole heart in spite of the blessings which he has given to us. These words become a call to repentance. The daily renewal and repentance that God wanted from his people then and still desires today begins in the inside and manifests itself outwardly.

The Augsburg Confession (one of the confessions of the Lutheran Church) helps us to understand the nature of repentance:

*Repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel...and believes that for Christ sake, sins are forgiven...This faith comforts the conscience and delivers it from terrors. Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruits of repentance. Because through faith the Holy Spirit is received, hearts are renewed and endowed with new affections so as to be able to bring forth good works.*

Here then we see the reason for following God's commands – it's not so that we can be blessed, it is because we have been blessed. The Lord Jesus removed the curse of our sins by offering his perfect life over to death. He died the death we deserved and even gives us the credit for the perfect life that he lived. The Lord our God is delighted with us for Jesus sake. He loves us as his dear children. He promises us grace and every blessing and we can be sure that the Lord is faithful to his promises. He declares: (Exodus 20:5-6 NIV) **I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

In his grace, God has promised his love to thousands of those who love him and keep his commandments – and the amazing thing is the Holy Spirit calls us to faith and empowers us to do that.

We are not under God's wrath and anger – we stand in his grace and wait for whatever blessings he chooses to send us confident that all things will work for our good since we have been called according to his good will to love and serve him.

So dear friends Love the Lord with all your heart

1. He delights in you and desires to bless you and
2. He puts his Word into your hearts and desires your faithfulness.

Moses assured the people: **The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers, 10) if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.**

Then our text continues, **11) Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12) It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 13) Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 14) No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.**

God saw to it that his people were able to know what his will for them is. Adam and Eve were created with a perfect understanding of God's will. His will was written in their hearts. When they sinned against that will, they lost their perfect understanding of that will. Yet a remnant of that will written on their hearts remained.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul spoke about this fact. He pointed out that Gentiles who had never received a written copy of God's law showed that they had a knowledge of that law by doing some of the things required by that law. Paul said that this showed **that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.** (Romans 2:15 NIV)

You and I can understand what Paul meant. When we look at people in our society, we know many of them who may not even be Christians who still strive to be honest, to be respectful of others, who do not steal, who do not kill, who value marital faithfulness, and whose values truly reflect the 10 commandments. The natural knowledge of the law of God written on their hearts helps to keep sin from getting out of control or out of bounds – that is the law acting as curb.

No doubt, you have had some personal experience with this natural law as well – I'm sure that there have been times in your life when you were acutely aware of something that you did wrong and it made you feel miserable. Maybe you even thought what you did was a secret but your conscience bothered you so much that it led you to confess your sin and seek the Lord's forgiveness. That is the natural knowledge of the law at work in our lives.

God's will is obvious to all people – at least in a limited fashion. However, that knowledge as I have mentioned, sin clouds that understanding. At times, our conscience doesn't bother us even when we do something contrary to God's law. Again the Apostle Paul helps to explain what I have in mind: (Romans 7:7 NIV) **I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."**

It is only when God reaffirms his law for us that we can understand that even our desires can be and are sinful. God has written his law for us in his Word and revealed that Word to us because he desires our faithfulness.

Moses wanted the people to know that the simple Word of God was all they needed to create the faith, which would bring them God's blessings and enable them to serve the Lord with faithfulness. The will of God had been given to them through him and that Word of God had touched their hearts. There was no need to look far and wide to discover that will. It had been given to them. If they were to abandon that Word, they would be abandoning God's blessings.

So it is for us as well – the Lord has preserved his word for us. We have the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. God provides us with righteousness, peace, and joy through the Savior whom we hear about in his revealed word. In that Word God reveals his faithfulness to us. With that Word God calls us to faith and empowers us to be faithful to him.

Abandoning him and his Word means abandoning the Lord Jesus, who came to earth, suffered, died, rose, and ascended into heaven. It means rejecting the grace offered in the Word.

Dear friends as we have seen you truly have every reason to

**Theme:** Love the Lord with all your heart

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2. He puts his Word into your hearts and desires your faithfulness

Amen.