

Matthew 22.34-46
18th Sunday after Trinity
15 October 2017
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

You can't have a husband without a wife. You can't have mother without a child. A car with no wheels does you no good; and four wheels without a car are useless. They're like a cow and its moo. You can't have the Law without the Gospel; and you can't have the Gospel without the Law.

And the lesson today reminds us that the two go hand-in-glove. No Law. No Gospel. No Gospel. No Law. So that these two words of God must always be proclaimed in the church of God. You stop proclaiming the one, and it's out the door with the other.

So if you're sick of Law and Gospel sermons. Sick of the proper balance of Law and Gospel. If you're tired of learning what God would have you do. If you'd like to hear something more uplifting on Sunday morning than that you have a Savior from sin and death, please don't shoot the messenger!

For here we have it straight from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Himself: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." God's holy Law. Forever. Immutable.

And again: "How does David in the Spirit call Him Lord?" God's holy Gospel. Eternal and unchanging. Jesus pointing to Himself as David's Son and David's Lord. The promised Messiah and the Divine Savior. Law and Gospel. Gospel and Law. Hand in glove. And each in its own place. To be proclaimed in the Church to the end of this age.

So it's to these two things we turn our attention today.

First, the Law. A powerful thing. And a wonderful thing.

You know the situation. In Paradise, it was all perfection. And the Law gives us something like a telescope to see from here and now, Topeka, 2017, to then and there, the Garden at the foundation of the world, and to see the perfection of Paradise. And the Law says: If you want to know and experience the perfection of Paradise? Why, then love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And your neighbor like yourself. In those words you see not only what you should become, but what our race once was. And by those words and by doing those words Adam was saved.

That's the teaching of the Law. And it's a beautiful teaching. We come with the question: how am I to be saved? And the Law answers: "By doing this. By loving God. By loving your neighbor." And then, in case we're not sure what that looks like, it gives it all in the 10 Commandments. For love always has a form.

That is, you know the love commanded here not when you feel it, but when you see it. And you experience the love commanded here not when you're overcome by emotion, but when you're doing

something. Loving my neighbor isn't just liking my neighbor and not killing him, but helping and supporting him in every physical need. That's love.

And loving God isn't a spiritual high. It's a healthy fear of Him. It's a healthy trust of Him. It's a constant calling upon Him in prayer. And it's a love of hearing and doing His Word. What a stupendously marvelous teaching, the Law! If I want to live the life of Paradise, there I have it all.

Now, I want to tell you all something. There's a very dangerous teaching out there called antinomianism. It's a big word, I know. But you've heard it from me before. This is what it teaches. It teaches that: "Even if you don't keep the commandments of God to love Him and your neighbor—yes, *especially* if you don't—it's okay. It doesn't matter. If you believe you'll be saved." Sad thing is, this teaching isn't only popular in the common Lutheran imagination; it was invented by would-be Lutherans already back in Luther's day. Today its chief proponents still go under the banner of Luther's Rose. And if you've ever felt justified in your own sinning—why, you're an antinomian.

But being an antinomian isn't being a Lutheran. It's not the teaching of Luther. Nor is it the teaching of Jesus. Nor is it the teaching of Scripture. To the woman caught in adultery Jesus doesn't say, "Hey, lady, you're off the hook. You're free. Go on. Go back to your lover. Jump in the rack and have another roll in the hay." He says, "Go and sin no more." And it's a constant teaching in the epistles. Paul says that those who live according to the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5). God looks at His Old Testament people and asks where the fruit is (Isaiah 5). And James says that faith without works is dead (Jas 2.14f.).

But the Law doesn't just show you what you were like. And what you ought to be like. And how to be saved and live in Paradise. Because when it shows you what Adam was like, it also shows you what you're not like. It shows you what has since Adam been lost. It shows you that, like Adam, you're under God's wrath. And it constantly, constantly holds you guilty. Run through the 10 Commandments quickly and just review the last ten minutes of your life and I guarantee you, you'll see quickly how you've lost it.

But the Law never gives up. It's like a nagging parent. Problem is, try as you may, you can't do it. And even the jury of your very own conscience finds against you. What does the Law demand, but that you love God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind? But you don't. You know this. If you did, you wouldn't buck so hard against His Law. And so your conscience accuses.

And here's the worst part: God Himself agrees and makes you damned and condemned. But if you turn to the Law and say, "What am I supposed to do now?" it becomes like a gym teacher telling a paraplegic to climb the rope—you remember the rope from gym class, right? Strung from the floor to the ceiling?—and all the Law can answer is: "I don't know." It can say, "Do it," but it can't say how. It's dumb and it has nothing to say.

That's why the second part of this Gospel for today is so important: Because David's Son isn't just David's Son, He's also David's Lord. Which is to say that the one born of the flesh of David is the Son of God.

And it's this Son of David and David's Lord who interposes Himself—sticks Himself right between God's Law and you. He had no need to do it but His pure grace and mercy. He had no need to obey His own Law. But He did it anyway in your place and for you.

And His love for the Father? Talk about obedience! He was obedient to His Father's desire to save to the point of death, even the death of the cross!

And talk about love of neighbor! That's why He became flesh. He couldn't very well fulfill the Second Table of the Law by just being God. But by being man? Then He makes *you* His neighbor. And He loved you, His neighbor, not only as He loved Himself, but more than He loved Himself. To the point that He took *your* sin on Himself. So that it was killed and buried with Him. So that it might never have any claim on you again. So that His death becomes your life. So that you have the forgiveness of all your sins and with it life and salvation.

And so while the Law stood there like a gym teacher barking at a paraplegic to climb the rope without any help, the Incarnate Word did something.

For in David's own flesh David's Son did what David's flesh could not do. He obeyed the holy Law of David's Lord. For David. And for you. And perfectly.

And thanks be to God for it. Because do you remember how pitifully and without fear of the Lord David raised his children? Remember Bathsheba? And remember how David trembled at the words of Nathan, "You are the man"?

Well, in David's own flesh David's Son and David's Lord interposed Himself between the raging prophet and David. And instead of the prophet pointing to David, it was Pilate, as he said, "Behold, the man!"

Now that's a sermon the whole world should hear: Behold the man. Behold the man who bears His own ancestor's sin. Behold the man who bears your sin. Behold the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world. Behold Him who knew no sin but was made to be sin for you. That you might be the righteousness of God in Him. Behold Him. David's Son. And David's Lord. Your brother according to the flesh; and your Lord who descended from heaven to save you.

That's the Gospel. And through the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel He's already begun to turn you into what you're gonna be. For out of you, a death-ridden clump of clay, He wants to make a living, immortal creature. And out of you, a sinner, He wants to make a saint.

And what does a saint look like? He looks like someone covered in the righteousness of Jesus through the forgiveness of sins. And who lives a life shot through with gratitude for his redemption. Who loves the Lord his God with all his heart with all his soul and with all his mind and his neighbor as himself. That's what a saint looks like. And that's what God's turning you into. That's what you'll be someday. Entirely. That's God's Gospel. You'll grow into the Law. Perfectly. And only in the Last Day.

But in the meantime, while that Law tells you what you will be and what you should be, it also tells you you don't keep it properly. You know that as well as I do. God has claimed you as His saint. And try as you may to live up to it, you can't. At least as long as this flesh is hung around your neck.

But that's exactly why David's Lord also became David's Son: to forgive your sins. All of them. Those prior to your Baptism and every sin after your Baptism. All of them. And why David's Lord poured out His Spirit on the earth. So that through Baptism and Confession and the Sacrament of the Altar and His Word and preaching He might live among His own with the forgiveness of all their sins. Preserve them in the faith. And bring them at last to everlasting life.

That He who once made saints and sinners out of sinners alone might finally make saints and nothing more out of you who are still saints-and-sinners.

God grant it you all for Christ's sake. Amen.

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