

1 Corinthians 5.9-13

“Purge out the Old Leaven”

“‘As Surely as I Live,’ God Said” Midweek Lenten Series at SJELC, CLC, and ZELC

Wednesday after *Invocabit*, 21 February 2018

St. John’s Ev. Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

Wednesday after *Reminiscere*, 28 February 2018

Calvary Lutheran Church, Toepka, Kansas

Wednesday after *Oculi*, 7 March 2018

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Vassar, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

Welcome to the first of our five Midweek Lenten services. This year the theme of our services is entirely appropriate to Lent. Repentance and forgiveness. The 5<sup>th</sup> Chief Part of the Catechism. Confession and Absolution; the Office of the Keys. All gathered under the theme “‘As Surely as I Live,’ God Said.”

If you’ve paid much attention at all to your Bible reading, you know that when Scripture cites Scripture it’s never just for the Scripture cited, but for that Scripture and its context. We hope that you’ll bear that in mind as you hear the title of our series, “‘As Surely as I Live,’ God Said.” Because the title was chosen with that same allusive quality. The hymn those words are drawn from goes on and says this:

“As surely as I live,” God said,  
I would not see the sinner dead.  
I want him turned from error’s ways,  
Repentant, living endless days.”

God’s entire purpose in giving us the Scriptures. God’s entire purpose in giving us His twinned words of Law and Gospel. God’s entire purpose in giving us Confession and Absolution and the Office of the Keys is nothing other than this: that the sinner—you—repent. That the sinner—you—turn from error’s ways. That the sinner—you—believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world.

But that’s just the point. Jesus Christ is the propitiation for sin. That’s Jesus’ job. He atones for sin. He saves from *sin*. In other words, in order for you to have Jesus Christ for what He is—a Savior—you must have sin. If you have no sin, you have no need of Jesus. To put it in the most Lutheran way possible, the most unholy and unworthy of the holy Gospel are...actually the most worthy.

And why’s that? Because the Gospel makes of the greatest sinner the greatest saint.

If Gospel’s entire job is to forgive sins, and it is, then the greatest sinner is turned into the most “gospelled” of all and the greatest saint. That’s Paul’s point when he calls himself the chief of sinners. No greater sin could there have been than to do what Paul did—try to strangle the infant church in its cradle—so that Paul’s debt of sin was like the man in the parable who owed 10,000 talents to his master. The GDP of an entire country.

But through the forgiveness of sins, the Lord made Paul, this worst of sinners, into Paul, this greatest of saints. Not because of his work for the sake of the Gospel; but because he had been forgiven much. For all of which thanks and praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. For no other reason than this: that we might be made the righteousness of God in Christ.

You're with me thus far, right? The flip side of what I'm saying, though, is this: where there is no sin, there is no forgiveness. And where there is thought to be no sin, there is thought to be no forgiveness.

And that's where the power of the binding key lies. It's the ultimate preaching of the Law. It stops up every mouth before God. It puts a sock in every excuse for sin. It's the double edged rapier of God's holy Word, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It thunders from the pages of Scripture that the unrepentant have no hope in Christ, no share in Christ, and no hope of everlasting life, only of a sinner's death and eternal condemnation. And turns them, bound, over to Satan. It's like Nathan's finger reaching out of the holy Scriptures and saying to unrepentant David, "You are the man."

And for the swindler and the liar. For the cohabitor and the adulterer. For the reviler and the one who lives in disdain of the authorities God Himself has set up. For the one who in his greed has made his wallet his god and become an idolater. For the one whose hope is found not in Jesus Christ but in the last drip of a bottle of 80 proof Scotch and at the bottom of a baggy. For the sinner who's entirely satisfied with her own sin, thank you very much—for that one it is a hammer that shatters every hope and a rope that cordons them from the body of Christ, the Church, because they have no share in Christ and therefore no community with the believers in Christ. It is the harshest of words.

\*\*\*\*\*

We often don't like to think of those harsh words of God, do we? I don't. And frankly, I don't like using them. Neither does your [other] pastor.

But your [other] pastor and I were called not to palliate, wheedle, and cajole, but to proclaim the whole counsel of God.

God forefend that it should come to this for you—but for the love of God, when your pastor is compelled to use the binding key on you, listen to him! When your sin has got such a stranglehold on you that others can see it, but you can't, don't become like hard-hearted Pharaoh! Because the more you resist God's holy Word, the more resistant you will become to God's holy Word. Instead, hear in that proclamation of God's condemning Law the voice of the Lord who says, "I would *not* see the sinner dead! I want him turned from error's ways, Repentant, living endless days!"

And finally, fellow-redeemed: when your pastor has to use that key, back him up. Because here's the one last thing that needs to be mentioned about this binding key: it is for the good of the body of Christ, the Church.

Because sin has a corrosive effect. In the body of Christ we all set an example for one another. If we attend church weekly, that's an example to everyone else to aspire to. And it's for their great blessing. If we're generous in our offerings, that's an example to everyone else to aspire to. And it's for their great blessing. If we always come with a kind, edifying word, that's an example to everyone else to aspire to. And it's for their great blessing.

But if we live in our sins. And find no need to repent of them because we don't think much of them. Then we not only trample on God's holy Law. But we turn the Gospel by which God saves sinners into a farce. You see, sin is so serious that the Son of God must die for it. And unrepentant sin turns that death into a joke.

But it's hardly a joke. Instead, that death—and resurrection—are the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. Because at the cross the ultimate use of the binding key is made. In His sacred body, Christ bears all sin. In His sacred body, Christ is put to death as the greatest of sinners, and forsaken, cut off, by His Father. So that you, a sinner, may be counted righteous; so that you, a dying descendant of Adam may be given life. So that you, who were an enemy of God, might be reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. So that the key that might be used on you would not be the binding key, but the loosing key. Proclaiming you free from all sins, from death, and the devil's power.

And that's the ultimate goal of the binding key. To preach an unrelenting Law to the unrepentant. That they might repent, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved.

Even so, Lord Jesus, help!

Amen.

*sdg*  
*jsb*

Please open your hymnbooks to page 326, the 5<sup>th</sup> Chief part. About 2/3 of the way down the page you'll see the question *What is the office of the keys?* We'll begin reciting the catechism there and continue to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Chief Part.

*What is the Office of the Keys?*

The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.

*Where is this written?*

This is what St. John the Evangelist writes in chapter twenty: "The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; but if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'"

*What do you believe according to these words?*

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, it is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.