

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
September 16, 2007

Law & Gospel

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Epistle, which was read to you earlier.

When you hear the term “law,” what do you think about? Do you think about the police? Do you think about what it is that you are not supposed to do? Do you think of the good of the law, for your protection? Or do you think like the song of Judas Priest, *Breaking the Law*?

Most of us think of the negative connotations of the word “law.” We rarely think of the good of the law. We don’t think that because of the law, we are protected from harm and danger. If it weren’t for the laws like speed limit, laws against drinking and driving and laws requiring you to wear a seat belt, there would be a lot of unnecessary deaths. Laws are not made to punish us or to take away our freedom; laws are put in place for our protection. Laws usually come about because of a negative experience, such as the loss of life. It is because of that negative experience that the law is put into place.

For the Church, we too have the Law, to show us what it is that we need to do and what not to do. While you have the Law with a big “L” in place, you will always have those who twist the Law, make it say things that it doesn’t really say. Paul says that *“certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.”* These were people who want to

be law teachers but they have no idea what it is they're teaching. They declare certain things without understanding **what** they declare, and pronounce with great confidence on what this and what that signifies without even understanding what these things are on which they make such pronouncements. It would be for us today to have someone who has watched *Grey's Anatomy* to perform major surgery on you. They have no idea what they're doing, but they have seen it on TV – therefore that makes them certified to operate.

Paul's charge to the young pastor Timothy is to deal with these false teachers of the Law before they do major damage to his congregation. While Timothy is a young pastor, he is trained, while these false teachers of the Law are not. Paul left the church of Ephesus in Timothy's care. This was a church needing order in worship as well as doctrinal correction, plagued by its false teachers. Since Paul could not be there, Timothy has been charged to be the pastor, to teach the Law and the Gospel to those at Ephesus, to correct doctrine and put the focus of the church back on Christ.

What is the purpose of the Law? Why does it need to be preached properly? Isn't the Gospel what matters anyways? Isn't that all we need? We have the Law because a negative experience occurred, one that forever changed of all creation. That negative experience was sin. In a world of no sin, where all was perfect, Satan slithered in and brought with him sin and death. In that instant, all was forever changed. There was no longer the utopia which God had created. There was no longer living in the Garden of Eden with walks with God in the cool of the day. We were kicked out of the Garden, barred from it forever. What was once made in the image of God now became forever

marred by Satan. The tragic event had occurred and now something was needed. What was needed was the Law, to point us to the Gospel.

The Law has a three-fold purpose: curb, mirror and guide. As a curb, it threatens punishment. The end result of that is death. Death is precisely what we have received because of sin entering creation. As a mirror, it reflects and shows us our sins. It shows to us the result of our sin, utter despair because of our fallen nature. Because of the mirror, it leads us to see the Law as a guide, a guide which leads us in the paths of righteousness. That path of righteousness leads us to the glory of God, His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. That's where the Gospel comes into play.

The Gospel was given to Paul just as it was given to us. It was given to Paul, even in his sinful state of Saul as the chief persecutor of Christians. Paul calls himself “*a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.*” He knew that he was a sinner. He knew that he was the chief of sinners. If Paul had a hymn which summed up his life, it would be this: *Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me. Died that I might live on high, Lives that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine.* He didn't deserve anything from God except death and wrath, but that's not what God gave to him. Paul said that he received mercy. He discovered that somehow the mercy of God neutralized all of the sin which he had committed. He visualized his dark past as washed away, saying, “*the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*”

Paul had come to see that in His love, God had miraculously taken all of Paul's sins and failures and his entire life and placed it upon His Son, Jesus Christ. God had chosen to use Paul as an example of what grace can do for men, thereby demonstrating

the relevance of the Gospel for the whole world. He had been a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man. In his early days as a wonder boy of the Pharisees, Paul had zealously hunted the Christians and violently opposed the gospel of Christ. Such a background rendered him a most unlikely candidate for the job of apostle. Yet he had been shown mercy by the Savior. He was chosen, converted on the road to Damascus and appointed as apostle to the Gentiles. Paul is an object lesson of grace. He deserves the opposite, but the Savior loves him and forgives him.

We all deserve the opposite of what it is that we have been given. When we should have received death, we have received life. When we should have received God's wrath, we have received God's grace.

Like Paul, the Gospel is preached all around us, but we remain ignorant of its real content. We have closed our hearts, we have refused to listen, and we have chosen to continue in unbelief. However, the Gospel continues to work on us. God continues to show to us grace. Regardless of **our** attitudes, God still cares for us. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, he punished them by kicking them out of the Garden of Eden. When sin became a part of creation, God did not withdraw Himself. Instead, He promised the coming of a Savior. What Paul says is true, *"that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."*

The Gospel's concern has always been with this all-important question: *"What must I do to be saved?"* It gives hope and promise to all who are troubled by their sin. It has always been missed somehow by those who have *"trusted in themselves that they were righteous."* The Gospel's answer is the potent announcement: *"Christ Jesus came*

into the world to save sinners.” It declares unequivocally that salvation is from God, it is through Christ, and it is for the whole world!

The Gospel’s appeal is to faith: *“the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.”* The Scriptures have given us many reliable witnesses, who, like John have *“heard...seen...looked upon”* Him who was *“the Word of life.”* With urgency and divine compulsion, Paul was committed to proclaiming this Gospel wherever he went. He confessed unashamedly that he needed it, personally, for he said he was the foremost of sinners.

Each and every one of us is the chief of sinners. Paul’s “theme song” is our “theme song” as well. Each and every one of us has the urgent need of the Gospel. Each and every one of us has been given the Gospel because each of us are sinners under the Law. That Law shows to us our sins and the great need of the Gospel; the Gospel given to us by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is through that Gospel which we have received the mercy of God, the forgiveness of sins and the right to be called sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.