

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.” (Deu 30:15)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Actually,
it is God who sets before you today “life and good,” and “death and evil.”

“If you obey the
commandments of the LORD your God... you shall live” (Deu 30:16).

“But
if your heart turns away... you shall surely perish” (Deu 30:17).

These
are hard words...

For contrary to what
our Gospel-soaked Lutheranism may have otherwise led you to believe, God
expects you to keep His law!

Walking in the Way
of His testimonies and keeping His statutes is not an option!

This is
not a command that disappeared with the OT, let alone after your baptism.

For as Jesus Himself
said, He did not come to abolish the Law, but to keep it perfectly as the New
Adam.

And today He makes
it clear that He intends for you to keep it as well.

Some of
you may leave this morning with a sensation of whiplash, for in the past,

I have preached this
portion of the Sermon on the Mount to show you how easily and frequently you
sin, that you might be all the more hungry for Christ's forgiveness.

And rightly so! We call this "the second use of the Law" -

It shows us our sin, that we might turn to our Savior.

The
problem is, if we stop there, we stop too soon,

for we fail to move on to that "third use of the Law" which
basically says,

"You are indeed
forgiven in Christ... Now *keep* the Commandments - Seriously!"

This
"third use of the Law" is the ongoing preaching that we are now to live as
God's people according to His statutes.

And if we reject this use of the law, then our repentance is
a sham,

for we will find
ourselves under the delusion that we can somehow be saved while living the life
of our own choosing based on what we think, what we feel, what we want, what
we
need in the moment

without
a care for how God would have us live.

Of
course, this is the stuff that makes us Lutheran pastor's so nervous, which is
why we tend to steer clear of preaching the Law in all its fullness.

For in the moment we proclaim the absolute necessity of

keeping the law,

we risk robbing you
of your Baptismal comfort and your confidence in God's promise that you are
saved by grace alone.

That's
why we have to be so careful to understand the *context* into which Jesus
speaks these words today.

For if you'll notice,
He's not speaking to the self-righteous Pharisees or to the heathen "crowds,"
but to the "Blessed" -

to
His disciples -

to those who have
already been saved by grace through faith and have now been gathered into His
presence on that Mount, just as those Israelites who had been saved through the
waters of the Red Sea were gathered before God at Sinai.

Like
those Israelites who had *already* been saved when they heard God's order
to obey the commandments (Deu 30:15-18),

and like those
disciples whom Jesus had *already* gathered to the foot of that Mount by
grace,

you,
too, are already saved!

You
have already been Baptized and redeemed by the blood of Christ!

Your works did not save you - they never could and they never
will!

Only Christ

crucified and risen for your forgiveness, life, and salvation could do that - and He has! You're good to go!

But

that is not to say that you, the disciples, or Israel could not lose that salvation by ignoring the Words that come next.

For now that you have been blessed and set apart as a new creation, you are indeed called to new life,

that as God's Holy and redeemed people, you may be salt and light to the world -

that you may live under Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness... starting NOW.

Starting

now, you have before you life and good, death and evil -

life if you love the LORD your God, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments;

death

if you turn away.

And I

suppose the question is, how can we possibly live this new life to which we have been called?

The answer is, you can only live this new life IN Christ, which is to say,

you

can only live this new life through ongoing repentance -

through the ongoing

turning from your sin and returning to your Baptism where you were blessed and united with Christ to begin with.

For by

your union into Christ's death and resurrection through Baptism, you became a new creation (2Cor 5:17) IN Christ.

"Born again" is not something you work at, but something you are.

"You were washed," as St. Paul writes,

"you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1Cor 6:11).

Through

this washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, you have been justified by grace, having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7),

and so you ARE blessed.

Blessed

ARE you who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for

yours IS the kingdom of heaven.

But

now, let us not stop at the Beatitudes, for today Jesus has more to say.

And He's serious!

That's what all that

business about eye-gouging and limb-slinging is all about.

For even

though the Gospel makes it clear that "Good works are NOT necessary for your salvation," the Law says,

"Good works ARE necessary, for God demands them!"

He has never *quit*

demanding them, which is why Jesus is so serious about this.

He's

not preaching the Law merely to show you your sin, but to show you the new life to which you have been called!

He's not laying down

the Law as the path to salvation, but as the way of life among the saved -

among the "blessed"

who have been called out of the darkness to be salt for the earth - to be a light to the world -

to be a part of the

solution to this world's darkness and not a part of the problem!

It goes

something like this: Are you a maniac on Twitter or Facebook?

Do you delight in

fits of murderous rage against those whose world-view is different from yours?

Stop it!

Are you a

Trump-hating Democrat who lays waste to those ignorant, bigoted, money-hungry Republicans who are ruining the world? Enough already!

Are you a

self-righteous Republican waging attacks against those idiot, socialist, hypocritical Democrats? Don't do that!

That's

Satan's game, and in the Words of Jesus,

your participation

with the devil - your anger, your labels, your insults make you murderers liable to the fire of hell (Matt 5:21-22)!

You

have been called to higher things, to better things -

to
be a light for the world!

And
what about those cravings?

Are you giving way to
your lusts, to your adulterous fantasies, to your porn, heaven forbid? You must
stop!

Are you
weary of your spouse, ready for a break, looking for an exit? Don't go there!

Scratch that D-for-Divorce word from your vocabulary now!

Do you tend to color
your speech with expletives or oaths to strengthen your words? No more!

You
no longer work for Satan!

The
time has come to take your stand against the devil and to turn away from this
fallen world's tired antics.

The time has come to repent and discipline your sinful flesh.

For nothing will
snuff out your light faster than sticking it under the bushel of hatred and
lust and foul talk.

Listen
to these words of your Lord who has set you free from the devil -

free from this misery -

free from this sin,
death, and hell, and take your place with the blessed-

with those saints in
every time and place who love the LORD your God, who "obey His voice and hold

fast to Him" (Deu 30:20).

And
remember this:

Whenever you find yourself going the way of darkness -

whenever
you find yourself acting angry, lustful, or disobedient,

know that you have
entered into the way of death -

that you have
departed the new life to which you have been called, and have placed yourself
under God's wrath.

But do
not despair.

For God does not
desire the death of the wicked, but that you should turn from your sin and
live.

And by
turning, He does not mean coming to this altar for forgiveness without a care
about whether or not you continue in your sin after you leave,

but coming to this
altar to have your Baptismal garment cleansed in the blood of Christ and to be
raised anew,

purified
and strengthened in Him to go forth as salt and light,

FREE
from your sin, FREE to walk in His ways -

free to keep His
commandments and live in peace and joy with Him and with one another for life
everlasting.

I leave
you with the words of our Psalm,

“Blessed are those
whose way is *blameless*, who walk in the law of the LORD!

Blessed are those
who *keep* His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart, who also
do no wrong, but walk in His ways” (Psa 119:1-2).

Blessed
are YOU, in other words, for you have been united with Christ through your
Baptism.

And now it is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in
you.

And the life you now
live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave
Himself for you (Gal 2:20).

Hold
fast to that life;

hold fast to His testimonies;

hold
fast to His Law, and you shall not be put to shame -

in
the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:21-37