

Serve and Obey

Sunday Epiphany 6, Year A

Deuteronomy 30: 15 – 20; 1 Corinthians 3: 1 – 9; Matthew 5: 21 – 37

February 16, 2020

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Obedience. The government demands it of its citizens. Parents demand it of their children. Yet, as adults, we want to be our own God and do our own thing. We pledge our obedience to our spouse; to love, honor and cherish...to be faithful to them... then times get hard, someone screws up and the marriage implodes.

We are obedient to our sports team, soap opera, favorite actor, favorite soda, favorite food joint...

But, our obedience is fickle. It changes according to our moods and our whims. We see this in our relationship with our God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. God demands obedience, we shrug it off. God gives commands, we ignore them. God directs us toward holiness, we, like a dog, return to our vomit. (Yes, that is gross. But, its biblical and it is supposed to be gross...sin is gross).

We know God is merciful. We know God is love. We know that we are His children. We know that we are heirs to His kingdom. But, we also forget how much He loves us. How much it cost for us to be given such a place of honor.

In order for you to be adopted as His child, He gave up His Son. In order for you to be an heir, Christ gave up His kingdom, became a man and suffered. He suffered ridicule, wrath, anger, spite... In order for you to live, Christ gave up His life.

Remember the cost. The cost of disobedience. The cost of discipleship. Your entry into eternal life, while free for you, cost Christ everything.

Yet, you still live as you please. You mock His created order. You mock His mercy. You mock His commands in marriage. You mock His gift of peace. You mock His commandments. You mock His gift of love. You are disobedient.

I usually add myself to these admonishments. I am not excluding myself, at all. But, I don't want you to pass this off as, well if all these other people, or even pastor can't do it, at least we are in the same boat...even if it is going down.

Please, do not take this lightly. Take this as a real opportunity to examine yourself. Your God demands, commands, and expects obedience. Don't shrug it off. No one can justify our sins easier than we can. But, just because we justify it in our own minds, that does not mean that God is okay with it. Instead, we are simply deceived. And the further down that path we go, the darker and darker it will get, as we move farther and farther away from the light. And once you are so far from the light, when you have hardened your heart, thinking your sin is okay, then you are in serious danger.

“See,” says your God, “I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply...But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish... Therefore, choose life...” (Deut. 30:15-16a, 17, 19b).

Martin Luther gave to us a beautiful paradox revealed in Scripture. *Simul justus et peccator*, which means, “simultaneously saint and sinner.” This is the Christian struggle. We are born in sin. We are born of sin. We are not innocent. Sin is our unnatural state that has been

handed down to us from our first parents. It is our brokenness. It is our shame. It is our fault. St. Paul often calls it the “old Adam”.

Yet, even though we are born in sin, and are, by our fallen nature, enemies of God. God has reconciled us to Himself by the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. Because of Him, we receive faith from God, and with that faith comes forgiveness, life and salvation.

Yet, both of these things, both saint and sinner, rage within us. Saint and Sinner. Holy and unholy. Righteous and wrongdoer. St. Paul says, “*For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing*” (Rom. 7:15, 19).

Moses, St. Paul, and our Lord, Jesus, all lay down the Law today. They hit us hard. They make us uncomfortable. They make us angry. At least, they should. That is what they are trying to do. They are trying to wake up the people they are speaking to. They are trying to get the fire burning in their bellies. And, I hope they have done that to you. If not...

If not, then you don't see the need to reevaluate your sinful condition. If not, then you feel justified in what you do. Even if it is contrary to the way God had designed you to live. We love ourselves. Everything else is second, third, fourth ... and who knows which number is where God ranks.

Choose good. Choose obedience. Choose to be the person God has commanded, demanded, and desires you to be. Being a disciple is hard. It is messy. It is work. It is painful. But, God says to trust Him. He says it is worth it. “*Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.*”

Choose to move from death to life, from darkness to light, from spiritual milk to solid food. I guess, the saying is apt here, “Grow up.” Grow up in the faith. Chase after the things of God. Follow Him and His commandments. Be an obedient child, not an unruly one. Listen to Him. Follow Him.

The people of Israel thought they understood the Law of Moses. They believed they had it all down. Then Jesus comes along today, and blows it all up in their face. When you think you ‘have arrived’, remember, God doesn’t ask you to be better than your neighbor. He doesn’t ask you to be better than you were. He asks you to be perfect.

Yet, the best we can do is try it. I have already failed. So, have you. Lustful thoughts, hatred toward others, not keeping our word ...

Each commandment, dismantled throughout our day. Each thought not made captive. Each sin and our sinful lifestyles, justified in our minds and seen as no longer needed to bring before the cross.

But, my friends, bring them to the cross. Each failure, each hardship, each broken promise, each impure thought, each wicked thought towards another... bring it to the cross, repent of it, lay it down, call on the one who is hanging on that cross, bloodied and bruised, dying for your failure. He will help you. He will forgive you. He will give you aid. Your choices do have consequences, even as Christians. But, one of those consequences is NOT a loss of God’s love, mercy or forgiveness. Repent. Return to Him. Bring your failures to the cross. He will help. He will heal.

And once your wounds are healed, head back out to the battle field, stare down the devil, proclaim the Good News, and bring the other wounded back here, to the cross. Let us do the work of God, together.

Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.