

Pastor T.C. Arnold
8th Sunday after Trinity
Acts 20:27-38
July 26th, 2015

From the time we learn to speak we are given words to say. We didn't make up the words we know. Rather, we heard them, learned their meaning, and began using them to form thoughts and give responses. We learned words to speak from our parents. We learned what to say as children by imitating what we have heard time and time again. This is also the foundation for our prayer. We hear what God says and we say it back to Him. This is how conversations go. This is how we know we can shove a broken toy under the nose of our heavenly Father and ask with all boldness and confidence saying, "Daddy, fix it!" He has talked to us before and we know Him. We have spoken to Him many times. He knows us better than anyone, and, if we listen to Him, we know Him as well.

Three things prompt our prayers. First, is that the Lord tells us to pray. He loves when we talk with Him. He wants us to come to Him and wants us to realize that He hears us. Secondly, our needs prompt us to pray. Real prayer for us begins not with some abstract situation – but real life events. When we face an enemy or come up against a deadly disease. When we run into a life road block standing in our way – these are real needs. Third, it's good for us to know that we are helpless in prayer and that we totally rely on God. Jesus said in John chapter 15, "*Without me, you can do nothing.*" Helplessness is a powerful tool. Think of a baby. They are helpless but they can cry out in times of hunger or trouble. Helplessness teaches us how to communicate with our Heavenly Father. Beloved, you are not without this help.

In Acts chapter twenty, Paul reminds the overseers in the Church at Ephesus of their duty in service of the flock of God. This was the kind of duty that God had chosen for them. This is a case where the servants of the Good Shepherd Jesus also must be servants of the sheep. Just like any vocation of service, the service of God's people in the church is an honor and a privilege.

But that's not all. Paul reminded the people of the danger. As has been said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." The infection of the world is never far away. Where truth is, falsehood evermore attacks. There was a constant warfare to keep the faith intact and the Church pure from false doctrine. This may seem like work that would only include the words of men... but not so. It would mean that the people of God would live it...live their life by it... and even die for it if necessary.

Listen to the care and concern Paul shares with the Church in Ephesus, "*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*"

Living out God's Word is what the Christian life is all about. This is the "duty" part of our lives in Christ. And you may be saying, "But pastor, that sounds so much like the law. I thought we live our lives under the Gospel." Our lives in Christ bear fruit, like Jesus says in the Gospel text for today from Matthew chapter seven. The fruit is an indication of what the heart believes. Living out the Christian life is a life lived under both the law and the Gospel. Living

life in the active Gospel is living the life God has given for us to live. Maybe we don't understand this? Maybe our very Biblical and "right" teaching that we are saved by grace through faith without the works of the law gets in our way of understanding how to live the Christian life and what it entails.

Beloved in the Lord, it is your duty to live the life of Christ – because you are a Christian. If this sounds like the law, so be it. Whether we are talking about the law of God or the Gospel of God, we are talking about His Word. The law gives us Words to live by – in what we are to do and what we are not to do. As Christians, we live by the law. We are faithful to His Word – which means that we are living Christ's life more than just in this place. We live it everyday. That's hard. And Paul says that living as a Christian is a difficult duty. It can be dangerous.

It means saying what Jesus would say instead of what the world would say. It means standing up for what is right according to the Lord, instead of what is accepted by common society in this day and age of confusion. Kids, living the life of Christ might mean that you need to say, "No" to your friends who would like for you to do and something your parents and your Lord would not approve of. It might mean for us Christians to stop our bad behavior that feels good when we do it (badmouthing that co-worker, drinking too much, plotting hurt against someone who has hurt you) – but is destructive to our family and – yes – to our faith and our relationship with our Lord.

Beloved in the Lord, duty to our country puts our military in action. Duty to our Lord is going to put us into action as well. The law motivates but the Gospel is not idle. The Gospel work takes what has been gifted to you and sends it out to the nations. The Gospel work is saving grace that is not just received, but is given. Paul quotes Jesus in the text for today and says, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" When we come to this place, we are receivers. I want you to know that's what Divine Service is all about. We receive His blessings of strength and forgiveness of sins. We are receivers here in this place – for this is the place where our Lord meets His beloved people. But out there, what are we? We are givers. That's why Paul quotes the Words of the Savior. We are givers – Gospel put into action people – who bless those who need the blessing of the Lord, who forgive our neighbors when they sin against us, who share the truth in love when that Word of admonition or grace is needed, and who reflect Christ and His precious gifts in a fallen, crazy, backward world. "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Why is it? The reason is because your neighbor benefits from that giving through you.

Duty – to serve. Duty – a privilege. Duty – a gift. Danger – comes with duty. Danger – to self and others when duty is carried forth. Danger – when we don't carry out our duty – for country – for church – FOR CHRIST. The danger if we put down our duty is that the truth will not be heard – that the truth will not be given – that the truth will not be shared for the sake of the nations and for the sake of all of you. Our prayers for all those who carry forth the work of country and Lord – or whatever and wherever duty calls remain at the fore-front of our lips. The Gospel remains on our lips and in our lives. The Gospel, you see, was put into action by our Lord on the cross so you can see the cross and His blood in the waters of baptism, in the Supper of our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.