

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Deuteronomy 10:12-21  
October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012

*“You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve Him and hold fast to Him, and by His name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.”*

There can be no doubt that these words in the Old Testament text for today are words of law given for the sake of instruction. They are words telling the people how to act toward God and to live the godly life. *“What does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord...”* I mean, the text is clear. This is what we are to do – this is how we are to act. And when we really start to think about it, how many times have the children of Israel heard these words? They know this stuff, right? Yet Moses gives it all to them again. Why? Well, there is a reason.

Let’s do a quick history review. After being slaves to the people of Egypt for 400 years the Lord chose Moses to lead the Israelites back to the Promised Land given by God many centuries before to Abraham and his descendants. At the time of this writing, Moses is in the midst of the wilderness between Egypt and the Holy Land. 40 years they would be wondering around in the desert. There was a reason for that. They messed up and disobeyed God. Moses did as well. Instead of relying on God to provide for His people, Moses took matters into his own hands. He took his staff, hit a rock and made water come out so that the people would stop their belly-aching about being thirsty. The Lord promised He would provide. Moses didn’t listen... or he didn’t think He would... or he was tired of their griping.

So Deuteronomy was written to teach, to instruct the children of those who disobeyed. You see, the Lord told the Israelites (and Moses, for that manner) that they would not step foot into the Holy Land, God’s promised dwelling place for the people, because of their disobedience. Their children would, but not the ones who disobeyed. Moses is instructing the people, so that they might instruct their children and know how to walk with God, honor His Word, live for God in the days to come.

And that is what we want to teach our children and our grandchildren. In such a messed up world we live in... sin has become the accepted norm and morality in general has shifted. We desire to teach our children well – to walk in the ways of our Lord. But how are we teaching them? Beloved, teach them by allowing yourself to be taught. Listen and act as you take seriously the words of Moses. Teach your children well. Sometimes we aren’t good at this.

For example, you have heard the story of the little boy who gets caught stealing a pencil from one of his fellow classmates. The teacher tells the parent and the parent immediately reprimands the boy. He asks him, “How could you do such a thing? You know this is wrong.” The parent goes on to administer punishment and demands that he go to his room. And then as a final word the parent says, “And besides all of this, if you need a pencil, just ask me. I can get a hundred of them tomorrow from work.” Our own moral compass for ourselves – what we believe is right and wrong – has been damaged by a society that says, “It’s okay... and it doesn’t matter... as long as it’s not real bad.”

We make all kinds of excuses and we justify our behavior all the time. It’s natural. We can call it sinful. We are naturally sinful human beings. That’s what we are. And because we are, we are always going to make excuses for our bad behavior – and maybe not even acknowledge that it’s bad behavior at all. It’s so small. It’s just a few pencils. It’s just a little lie. It’s just that I’m a little

too tired for God today. If I don't play a little dirty, I won't get that promotion. These are but a few things Moses addresses to you.

It says in the text, "*you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him, and by His name you shall swear.*" Swear here means to take an oath of confession. This is confession of faith. Confess His name and hold fast to Him – be faithful to Him. Be faithful in all your words and all your ways to what God has said for you to do – for you to live. By His name you shall swear – confess – take a faithful oath.

Israel was told to hold to the Lord no matter what. They faltered and for that they were punished. Moses gave these instructions... for them... and for their children. Hold fast. Confess. Serve Him only and do it in all you do and with every bit of your very own conviction. Be for the Lord as He has been for you.

In the Gospel text for today the Lord Jesus was challenged by those who thought they knew much better than Him on what is the greatest of the commands. And instead of finding one in all the words of the Law, Jesus actually gives all the Law in one answer. He says, love the Lord your God with everything and love your neighbor as yourselves. You see, this is all the law and no one could keep it perfectly. That is, no one could keep it perfectly until Jesus arrived. It would take God Himself to keep it perfectly for you.

This was the problem for Moses and the Israelites. God promised this great land to His chosen people but they would not enter it. At the end of Deuteronomy we hear how the Lord shows the Promise Land to Moses – takes him to the top of Mt. Nebo on the east side of the Jordan River – but tells him that he will not enter it. The Jordan acted as a barrier to Moses and the Israelites. Their disobedience would cause them not to enter the land that God gave to Israel.

It's almost like the Jordan River is God's righteous judgment and law. No one can pass the test. No one can cross over on their own accord. Not one of those in that generation to whom Moses was sharing these words for life and service would pass through the judgment and the law of the Jordan River to live in this blessed land. But one would come along and make it possible for you.

When our Savior Jesus came to the Jordan River centuries later there was a man standing in the middle of it. His name was John the Baptizer. He was baptizing in that river and then he saw Him. He pointed to Him and called out, "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World.*" Jesus came to the Jordan and was baptized by John. This was the beginning of the public ministry of the Savior of the World. The Jordan River was the place Jesus would begin His journey to the cross. You see, beloved in the Lord, at one time the Jordan was the barrier of judgment and law for the people of God. And now, God has entered into those waters, opened them up, baptizes you, and welcomes you into the Promise Land. Now it is by faith that we live and have entry. Faith that Jesus has entered those waters when we could not, made us clean, and we have a God-given land of our own opened up to us – heaven!

The law, as given in the Old Testament text and in the Gospel reading, is for our life today. Live it. The Gospel of Jesus is our Lord intervening and calling us clean and holy by the washing our Lord has done of us. The Gospel is our Lord fulfilling all these instructions for us. He did what we are unable to do. The waters of Jordan River are no longer the barrier keeping us out. Now it is the way of eternal life. Amen.

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