

Sermon for Christian Education Sunday (August 28, 2011)

Deuteronomy 6:4-15

Rev. Shane R. Cota

For 40 years the Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness. For 40 years Moses had been leading them at God's behest as God's chosen servant to His chosen people. The fact that they had been wandering for 40 years was due to their disobedience, their refusal to go into the land that God has promised to them. So they were condemned to wander in the desert until that disobedient generation had died. And now, finally, after 40 years they are on the cusp of going into the Promised Land. Our Old Testament reading gives us some of Moses' words to the people, words inspired by God, given for the people to hear. Often, they didn't hear God. They didn't listen to Him as He spoke to them through His Word, especially His Word as He gave it through His servant Moses.

During their 40 year sojourn in the wilderness the people frequently complained and griped. They complained about the food and the lack of water. They complained about Moses (and when they complained against the words that Moses gave to them from the Lord, they were complaining about the Lord as well). They rebelled against Moses, threatened to stone him, gave him grief. In His righteous indignation, God sent punishments upon the rebellious people: some died from sickness, some were destroyed by fire, the ground opened up and swallowed some of them, and some died after being bitten by fiery serpents. All this because they would not hear the Lord and take heed to His Word. So now, after 40 years, Moses once again reminds the people to hear the Word of the Lord. And even though Moses won't be going into the Promised Land with them, due to his own disobedience to God, Moses is still God's chosen instrument. And Moses reminds them of what is really important and how they can be blessed. He speaks and says: "*Hear, O Israel!*" And the words he speaks are for us as well: "Hear, O Church!" "Hear, all people of God."

The first thing Moses does is to remind them who they belong to, who they worship, who has helped them thus far. The first thing we note is that this is a confession of faith. God's people confess who He is and who they believe in: "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!*" We confess this today, that God is one. We add to it the confession of Jesus Christ - that He is God in the flesh, God revealed as our Savior, who took on our flesh and blood to rescue us from sin and death. Since the coming of Christ, it has been plainly revealed to us that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are God, but they are not three gods, but one God – the Holy Trinity (Three-in-One). This is the confession of the Church yet today, and yet it is more than merely the confession of the Church - it is our personal confession! It is the confession of every single Christian. And it describes for us what it means to have a God. To have a God, according to this confession, means to live life in His presence, hearing His Word – believing it, speaking it, meditating upon it – for in His Word He gives us His presence, His very self. We fear, love and trust in Him above all things.

Moses is telling us that the Word of God is to be a part of our lives and of every moment of our day. *We are to see things and see one another from the perspective of the Word.* That is why He commanded that the Word be as a frontal between our eyes. *We are to act in accord with the Word.* That is why we are to bind it on our hands. He is commanding that when we reach out our hands we have the Word of God guiding our use of them. He commands the Word to be on our doorposts and on our gates so that when we go out or come in, we are conscious of Him and

His Word and His blessings, and so that *we deal with those we meet outside and those we meet in our homes* – our families – *with the Word of God in mind, guiding us*. There is nowhere where we are not Christians, no time when we do not belong to the Lord. Moses is telling us to always be mindful of this.

This confession is telling you that this truth - God's truth - shall guide all of your actions, words, and your thoughts. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”* You shall love God with everything you are and with everything that you have. And loving Him means hearing Him. We are to hear Him and pass His Words on to our children and children’s children. *“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”* That is how high and central a place God’s Word is to hold in our lives.

Know God and hold Him to be your God with every power of your life. It is the will of God for us to pass the truth of His Word and His love to the next generation. And this is not meant to be one task among many – it is the primary task of the child of God. We are to teach this to our children and teach them to do so to their children also. *You shall teach them **diligently** to your children*, when you sit, walk, lie down and rise. Do we do this? This is what Christian education is all about: teaching the Word to our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and also to keep on learning and growing in it *ourselves* on a *daily* basis! No one is off the hook; these commands of the Lord are for everyone without exception.

And why would God want us to do these things, to teach and learn His Word? It is for our good. It is so that we and our families know Him as the Giver of all good things – and as our loving heavenly Father. Moses told the children of Israel, and today he tells you, that you are to be occupied with God’s Word in all that you do, so that you do not *“forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”* The Lord delivered you from slavery to sin by sending His Son Jesus to die for your sins on the cross. Being baptized into His death and resurrection, you are set free from sin and death. This is the lifeblood of our Christian faith, and when we neglect to hear the Word and to teach it to the next generations, we are in danger of forgetting the Word and losing eternal salvation. Many among us already ignore the Word. When we do that, we will follow the false gods of the unbelievers around us – money, entertainment, sex, sports, shopping, recreation, excitement, drugs, alcohol, whatever you do in place of church – when these things become more important to us than the one true God, they have become false gods to us. Eventually God’s anger will be kindled and we will lose our place before Him. He does not tolerate other gods in His presence. Thank God for His gifts and blessings, but do not worship the gifts over the Giver.

And what is it that God sets before us as that Word which we are to teach so diligently? It is not only the law, the commands of God, but also His promises, the Gospel. He wants us to know His love for us. He wants us to treasure our salvation. He wants us to understand what sin is, and how deadly it is, and to know and dread the great evil of it. He wants us to see and understand the great gift of His deep love in sending His Son to be our Savior. Jesus died on the cross for you. God sent His Son to die for our failure to hear the Word and follow it diligently. He wants you to live, not in fear and pressured by the threats of the Law and the devil, but knowing how great His love for you is, and to live in the freedom of one whose sins have been forgiven and whose eternal destination is assured. He wants you to live in love and peace and joy and faith.

For the Father sent His Son to fulfill the commands of the Law so that believing in Him, we might receive the fulfillment of the promises God makes to those who trust in His Son alone for salvation.

And He wants the same thing for your sons and daughters. As Peter said in the reading from Acts, the promises of God are for all of His children, and for your children – and so it is clear that God would have your children to be His children. That is why He commands us to teach them. He commands that we teach by example, and by precept – meaning that we teach by deliberate and careful instruction. And it also means that we continue to learn ourselves as well. We are not to ignore worship and Bible study, but are to love worship and the Word. When you do something else when you could have gone to church or Bible study, you are showing what is truly important to you. You are following after other false gods and you are not taking the hearing of God's Word seriously.

Martin Luther took the Word seriously. That's why he wrote the Small Catechism. He originally had it printed as a wall poster for fathers to use in schooling their children in the essentials of the faith. Luther expected that fathers would ask to hear the daily memory work from their children. That is why each section of the Catechism begins with the heading, "As the head of the family should teach it to his household in a simple manner." God expects each one of us to teach our own children, and not just leave it up to someone else (even where you have the great blessing of a Christian school, children still need the Word taught and reinforced at home as well as at school).

The knowledge of the Lord is not automatic. It must be learned. Many of you know the Lord because of faithful parents who brought you in their arms to the waters of Baptism, and drove you to Sunday School and church, often leading the way by example. Some of you know because others spoke of Christ and confessed the faith to you in word and deed. And what blessings you now have in knowing the Lord and His will for you! And what is His will for you? Hear! Keep hearing! Hear continually! His Word is life! To hear His Word is not a burden, but a gift!

Knowledge of the Lord is not easily retained. Everything about the Gospel is contrary to our nature – and contrary to much of our experience! For that reason, we all need reminders. We need to rehearse the Gospel, that is, hear it and tell it over and over again. We need to remember the people in the Bible and how God worked in their lives even though they were sinners with the same failings we have. And we need to refresh our memories about God's promises and how good they really are. That is what this reading is about, keeping the Word of God before ourselves and our families, and one another, in every way imaginable and at all times so that we do not forget – or wander into sin and false belief, error and despair. We need God's Word and we need it desperately. We are complete fools if we think otherwise. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Ignoring Him is the beginning and end of foolishness.

God is so serious about His Word, and so sure we need reminders, that He even gave us the physical reminder of His holy Supper. He gives us the Lord's body and blood for us in and with and under the bread and the wine. He gives us such a gift through them that we could not ever provide for ourselves – and that we need so urgently – forgiveness of sins and the cure for death itself. He even tells us to **do it in remembrance of Him**. The Apostle Paul writes "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show the Lord's death until He comes.*" The Lord's Supper is a confession and reminder of Christ's work for us, and it is even more than that. Not

only does the Lord's Supper continually remind us of what Jesus did for us, it gives us Jesus in His true Body and Blood. This is food we did not earn, but that belongs only to those who hear, so that they will not forget.

Hear, O Israel. Hear, O Church. It is more than a simple command – it is a confession and a lifestyle. Hear, and hear often, and live in that Word and walk in it, and know the Lord. Know the Lord and His love and His grace in Christ – and help each other continue to know it by living your life in His presence and in sight of – and in earshot of His Word and all its blessings. Amen.