

IN NOMINE JESU

LOCKED UP ON ALL SIDES, FREED BY THE PROMISE

Hear the theme sentence drawn from the Word of God for this thirteenth Sunday after Trinity:

For to Abraham the promises were lifted up – also to his Seed. It does not say, “And to the seeds,” as upon many people, but as upon One: “And to your Seed,” which remains Christ.¹

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A strong tie binds the Old Testament and Gospel readings through this week’s Epistle reading. That connection is that the Promise of God to Abraham, to His Seed, and through Him alone the Promise, is for all his descendants, Jew, Samaritan and all peoples. God has fulfilled His promise, in Christ Jesus. His people from all nations receive the inheritance that His death delivers by grace through faith.

What that means is that you, no matter from what nations, tribes, peoples or race you might trace your lineage, you may, by grace through the faith of Jesus, receive the benefits of the Promise God made first to Eve, then to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Israelites. Salvation, wrought out in the faith of Jesus on the Cross, is that which makes anyone right with the Father, takes away God’s wrath at sin, and pays in full the debt sin brought upon the children of Adam. It is no mistake that this week’s theme of faith working through sacrificial love finds its place in the readings for this part of the long Trinity season.

¹ Romans 3:16.

For you who are attentive to the Church Calendar, this is the time of year named Laurencetide. It began last Sunday with the commemoration of the faith of a martyr early Church Deacon. He sacrificially gave of the treasures of the Church to the poor, the lame, the blind, the sick, and then gave his life in the faith as testimony that they were the treasures of the Church. Faith working itself out in sacrificial love was recalled Friday when the Church remembered the confession of the Mother of God. Next Sunday, faith working out in unconditional love in the life of another disciple of Christ, Bartholomew, will also be remembered. It is the time of year to especially recall the Lord's work in saving all who by grace through faith remain believing in the once-for-all atonement of Jesus Christ. In Him was God's Promise fulfilled, as our text declares:

For to Abraham the promises were lifted up – also to his Seed. It does not say, “And to the seeds,” as upon many people, but as upon One: “And to your Seed,” which remains Christ.²

This congregation, in her Sunday Adult Bible Studies from the Letter to the Hebrews has had God's promise of grace through faith reinforced over the past several months. It will be studied again in the next weeks as you move into the eleventh chapter. There, the word we translate “by faith” appears 18 times, following the

² Romans 3:16.

entrance of the Spirit's definition of faith – "For faith remains [the] realization of things hoped for, confidence of things not seen."³

Faith working itself out in sacrificial love caused the ancient Israelites to tend the wounds and anoint their conquered brethren and bear the feeble among them back to their kinsfolk at Jericho. Faith worked out in unconditional love moved the Samaritan to tend the wounds, anoint and bear the assaulted Jew to safety. Faith working by unconditional, sacrificial love enabled Jesus to tend your sin-inflicted wounds, to anoint your head with the Water and Word, and to bear you to your kinsfolk in the Church. That is the meaning of the conclusion of this week's reading from the Letter to the Galatians:

But the Scripture locked up on all sides all things under sin that the Promise from [the] faith of Jesus might have been given to the ones continually believing.⁴

The Old Testament Law, named just now, "the Scripture," is described by Paul in this section of his letter to the Church. He teaches that the Scripture of the Old Testament served several functions as the faithful awaited the fulfillment of the Promise God made in particular to Abraham. First and foremost the Apostle drives home the reality that human keeping of the Law of the Old Covenant would not make one right before God. That is, no human (save Jesus the Christ) has the power to perfectly keep the Word of God in all its letter and intent perfectly, daily and to the

³ Hebrews 11:1.

⁴ Galatians 3:22.

end of one's mortal days. Paul takes a whole section of the Words between our theme verse and the concluding verse for the week to explain, illumine, and instruct his hearers of that truth. Why?

Because the Spirit knows our human weaknesses, including the one that enables us to think that we each, somehow, maybe in just a little way, contribute some goodness toward our own salvation. It is not just the "American Spirit" that leads people to cling to our own good works, thoughts and intentions for some merit before God. It is the human spirit, inherited from Adam who desired to be like God, which indwells in all people from the moment of conception. That spirit still remains in those who are named, and found, as part of the family of God. Its fruits are found in the Church when people declare things such as "my faith is formed in love," or, "I decided to follow Jesus." That is what popular Christianity teaches. (Some people, reading the "We believe" section of our website, have actually tried to correct the biblical confession of salvation by grace through Christ's faith using phrases like those. How sad that anyone might think that something in us makes God love us enough to die for us! If there was, Jesus' death would not have been once-for-all, but a simple start that one would have to finish by his or own merits. Would you like to count on your good work or just plain goodness to gain or keep the salvation Christ died to bring? Could you ever be certain you had done enough? Lord, keep that thinking away from us)!

To help New Testament believers, in the verses we have numbered from 19 to 22, St. Paul declares the purpose of the Old Covenant Law. The conclusion the faithful may come to from his arguments drawn from both Greek, Roman and Hebrew civic law is that which many of you learned as children as the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed:

*I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.*⁵

The temptation to look to one's fulfillment of the Law is put down by clinging to that simple teaching. (And a reminder of it from time to time serves to help put down the tendency we all have to look to ourselves as contributing somehow to God's showing His favor, love and promises to us. It may serve to take away the "monster of uncertainty" that creeps up on those who fall into the trespass of looking to their worthiness before God). So that you receive comfort in this life that Christ Jesus did everything needed for your salvation, dear believer in Christ's blood-sacrifice as the full payment for all your sins, the inspired Letter reads:

⁵Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

For if the inheritance is from the Law, it is definitely not from promise; but to Abraham through promise it was given by God.⁶

Several words leap out of that sentence. The first is, “inheritance.” According to a strict-constructionist interpretation of civil law, what is the way that anyone receives an inheritance? The testator has to die. (This was true for the ancient Romans and Greeks alike. The Greeks who wrote their last wills and testaments, who filed them with the office of the civil courts, could not even amend their wills during their lifetime. On the other hand, a Roman person who wrote out his or her will was the only one who could, according to Roman law, change the will while alive. In either case, the testator had to die to put its words into effect). Who died to gift the promise given to Abraham to the people of God?

The answer must be Christ Jesus. In His death the fullness of the Promise, the inheritance of eternal blessed life, was poured out upon those who by God’s grace, through His faith, cling to the Promise. That is the reason for the Apostle’s words of assurance to people who were, and are, tempted to count on anyone else’s work for the gift of the Promise that God has given:

But the Scripture locked up on all sides all things under sin that the Promise from [the] faith of Jesus might have been given to the ones continually believing.⁷

⁶ Galatians 3:18.

⁷ Galatians 3:22.

To summarize and conclude this exposition of this part of the Letter to the Galatians for this year, I ask you, why did God declare the Old Testament Law if it was not to be kept by its hearers for their salvation?

The answer is threefold. First, the Law was given to declare sin is a legal offense against God. Second, the Law was added to the Promise to be in force until the Seed of the Promise, Jesus the Christ, would come. Third, the Law was ordained by angels through a mediator that the people of God would receive it as twice removed from Him. Then, when the Promise came, without a mediator, without heavenly angels, but by God Himself, it would be seen clearly for what it was – full and complete gift, God’s unconditional, sacrificial love working itself out in the faith of Christ. You who were once, as all people, locked in on all sides - prisoners of the Law; with the Law as your jailer; with no human possibility of escape: you have been freed by God through His Promise. God has done it all for you, and He will so do for others as you live out your lives under the inheritance that is in effect in Christ!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Trinity XIII (LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK One-year series)

II Chronicles 28:8-15; Galatians 3:15-22; Luke 10:23-37

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Additional Notes:

Ἀδελφοί, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω·

ὅμως ἀνθρώπου κεκυρωμένην διαθήκην οὐδεὶς ἀθετεῖ ἢ ἐπιδιατάσσεται.

τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ ἐρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ.

οὐ λέγει, καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἀλλ' ὡς ἐφ' ἑνός,

καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου,

ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός.

τοῦτο δὲ λέγω· διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ μετὰ τετρακόσια καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτη

γεγονὼς νόμος οὐκ ἀκυροῖ εἰς τὸ καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν.

εἰ γὰρ ἐκ νόμου ἢ κληρονομία, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας·

τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ δι' ἐπαγγελίας κεχάρισται ὁ θεός.

Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος;

τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη, ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπήγγελται, διαταγεῖς δι' ἀγγέλων

ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου.

ὁ δὲ μεσίτης ἑνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν, ὁ δὲ θεὸς εἷς ἔστιν.

Ὁ οὖν νόμος κατὰ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν [τοῦ θεοῦ]; μὴ γένοιτο.

εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζωοποιῆσαι, ὄντως ἐκ νόμου ἂν ἦν ἡ δικαιοσύνη·

ἀλλὰ συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφή τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν, ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

δοθῆ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.⁸

Luther's Works:

Before the angel. This is because God ruled this people through the mediation of angels, and it is said in Galatians (3:19) that the Law "was ordained by angels through an intermediary." Moses says to the people (Ex. 32:34), "My angel shall go before you," recommending to them the angel as the director of the people. In this manner Solomon says: "Do not say before the angel," namely, the one whom God has given as our director. "Before the angel," however, is the same as "before God." *Lest God be angry at your voice*, that is, see to it that you are not a despiser of your vow and that you do not become unfortunate in everything you do.⁹

55. *As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.*

Here all merit and presumption are brought low, and God's grace and mercy alone are exalted. For God has not helped Israel on account of their merits, but on account of His own promise. In pure grace He made the promise, in pure grace He also fulfilled it. Wherefore St. Paul says in Galatians 3:17 that God gave the promise to Abraham four hundred years before He gave the Law to Moses, that no one might glory, saying he had merited and obtained such grace and promise through the Law or the works of the Law. This same promise the Mother of God here lauds and exalts above all else, ascribing this work of the Incarnation of God solely to the undeserved promise of divine grace, made to Abraham.¹⁰

Thus Christ says in Matt. 25:34: "Prepared for you." This is a word in the New Testament which always contradicts the idea of merit, as in Galatians (3:18): "God gave it to Abraham by a promise and before the Law." Therefore the promise is sheer mercy, because no one asked Him to make the promise. It is the greatest of consolations for weak consciences that He does not base eternal life on our virtues or merits. If He had done that, no one would be saved; for we are so fragile, unstable, and unsure that after one hour we become ungodly and unbelieving. Therefore in order that our hope might be solid and sure, life eternal is based upon the promise of God, which cannot lie. There it is certain and firm.¹¹

⁸Aland, B., Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. 1993, c1979. *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.) . United Bible Societies: Federal Republic of Germany

⁹Luther, M. 1999, c1972. Vol. 15: *Luther's works, vol. 15 : Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23:1-7* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis

¹⁰Luther, M. 1999, c1956. Vol. 21: *Luther's works, vol. 21 : The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis

¹¹Luther, M. 1999, c1968. Vol. 29: *Luther's works, vol. 29 : Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis

So also in Galatians [3:19], dealing with the same question, he says: "Why then the law?" He does not, however, reply as Diatribe does, that it proves the existence of free choice, but he says: "It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made." It was because of transgressions, Paul says; not meaning, however, that it was in order to put a stop to them, as Jerome dreams,¹⁰ since Paul is arguing that a promise had been given to the future offspring that God would take away and put a stop to sins by the gift of righteousness; but it was in order to increase transgressions, as he says in Romans 5[:20]: "Law came in to increase sin." Not that sins were not committed or did not abound without the law, but that they were not known to be transgressions or sins of such grave consequence; on the contrary, most of them and the greatest of them were regarded as righteousness. Now, when sins are unrecognized, there is no room for a remedy and no hope of a cure, because men will not submit to the touch of a healer when they imagine themselves well and in no need of a physician. Therefore, the law is necessary to make sin known so that when its gravity and magnitude are recognized, man in his pride who imagines himself well may be humbled and may sigh and gasp for the grace that is offered in Christ.¹²

Again, in Genesis 22[:18], God promised Abraham, "Through your descendant shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Christ is that descendant of Abraham, says St. Paul in Galatians 3[:16]; he has blessed all the world, through the gospel [Gal. 3:8]. For where Christ is not, there is still the curse that fell upon Adam and his children when he had sinned, so that they all are necessarily guilty and subject to sin, death, and hell. Over against this curse, the gospel now blesses all the world by publicly announcing, "Whoever believes in this descendant of Abraham shall be blessed." That is, he shall be rid of sin, death, and hell, and shall remain righteous, alive, and saved forever, as Christ himself says in John 11[:26], "Whoever believes in me shall never die."¹³

Language, speech, and voice are thus gifts of God like any other gifts, such as the fruit on the trees. Now he who fashioned the mouth and put speech in it can also make and use speech even though there is no mouth present. Now the words which are here written were spoken through an angel. This is not to say that only one angel was there, for there was a great multitude there serving God and preaching to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. The angel, however, who spoke here and did the talking, spoke just as if God himself were speaking and saying, "I am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt," etc. [Exod. 20:1], as if Peter or Paul were speaking in God's stead and saying, "I am your God," etc. In his

¹⁰ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (Comment. in Ep. ad Gal.)*, II, 3 (MPL 26.366).

¹² Luther, M. 1999, c1972. Vol. 33: *Luther's works, vol. 33 : Career of the Reformer III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

¹³ Luther, M. 1999, c1960. Vol. 35: *Luther's works, vol. 35 : Word and Sacrament I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

letter to the Galatians [3:19], Paul says that the law was ordained by angels. That is, angels were assigned, in God's behalf, to give the law of God; and Moses, as an intermediary, received it from the angels. I say this so that you might know who gave the law. He did this to them, however, because he wanted thereby to compel, burden, and press the Jews.¹⁴

Although I maintained that St. Peter was in Rome, and still do, I would not want to die for it as for an article of faith. Moreover, I do not know how it could be either maintained or proven; indeed, no one (as far as I know) can prove it. It is not an article of faith, and no one is a heretic if he does not believe St. Peter was in Rome. On the other hand, it is outrageous to deny it unless it is thoroughly refuted. The safest thing is to let it remain uncertain and doubtful. For we ought to believe only what God has commanded us to believe in Scripture, and no one should either add to it or retract from it, as Moses teaches [Deut. 12:32] and as Paul says, Galatians 4 [3:15], "No one changes a man's testament or adds to it." How much less, then, should anyone change or add to God's testament.¹⁵

Book of Concord:

3:15 (216.12) From this point of view there is no difference between our traditions and the ceremonies of Moses. Paul condemns the ceremonies of Moses as well as traditions because they were thought of as works meriting righteousness before God and therefore they obscured the work of Christ and the righteousness of faith. With the removal of the law and of the traditions, he therefore contends that the forgiveness of sins has been promised, not because of our works but freely because of Christ, provided that we accept it by faith; for only faith can accept a promise.¹¹ Since it is by faith that we accept the forgiveness of sins and by faith that we have a gracious God for Christ's sake, it is an ungodly error to maintain that we merit the forgiveness of sins by these observances.¹² Someone might say in this connection that though we do not merit the forgiveness of sins, those who are already justified do merit grace by observing these traditions. To this Paul replies that Christ would be "an agent of sins" (Gal. 2:17) if we were to believe that after justification we are not accounted righteous for his sake but must first merit this by other observances. "No one adds even to a man's covenant."⁵ In other words, to the covenant of God, promising that he will be gracious to us for Christ's sake, we dare not add the condition that we must first earn our acceptance and justification through these observances.¹⁶

3:18 (119.84) Fourth, the forgiveness of sins is a thing promised for Christ's sake. Therefore it can be accepted only by faith, since a promise

¹⁴Luther, M. 1999, c1960. Vol. 35: *Luther's works, vol. 35 : Word and Sacrament I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

¹⁵Luther, M. 1999, c1970. Vol. 39: *Luther's works, vol. 39 : Church and Ministry I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

⁵ Gal 3:15.

¹⁶Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

can be accepted only on faith. In Rom. 4:16 Paul says, "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed," as though he were to say, "If it depended on our merits, the promise would be uncertain and useless inasmuch as we could never determine whether we had merited enough." Experienced consciences can readily understand this. Therefore Paul says (Gal. 3:22), "God consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." Here he denies us any merit, for he says that all are guilty and consigned to sin. Then he adds that the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification is a gift, and further that the promise can be accepted by faith. Based upon the nature of a promise, this is Paul's chief argument, which he often repeats (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:18). Nothing one can devise or imagine will ^(tr-147) refute Paul's argument.⁸⁵ So pious men should not let themselves be diverted from this declaration, that we receive the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake only by faith; here they have a certain and firm consolation against the terrors of sin, against eternal death, and against all the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18).¹⁷

3:22 (194.81) But clearly the promise was given and Christ revealed to us precisely because we cannot keep the law, and therefore we must be reconciled by the promise before we keep the law. Only faith accepts the promise. Therefore it is necessary for the contrite by faith to take hold of the promise of the forgiveness of sins granted for Christ's sake, and to be sure that freely for Christ's sake they have a gracious Father.⁸¹ This is what Paul means when he says in Rom. 4:16, "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed"; and in Gal. 3:22, "The scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." That is, all men are under sin, and they cannot be freed in any other way than by taking hold through faith of the promise of the forgiveness of sins.⁸² We must therefore accept the forgiveness of sins by faith before we keep the law although, as we said before, love follows faith, for the regenerate receive the Holy Spirit and therefore begin to keep the law.¹⁸

¹⁷Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

¹⁸Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia