

“He Who Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear”

Luke 14:25-35

In our three year lectionary series (we are currently in Series C), the creators of it generally tie together the Old Testament reading with the Gospel reading. The Epistle readings week to week systematically goes through primarily the letters of Paul but does include other writers. Last week, in Luke’s Gospel and in the reading from Proverbs, we are told to take the lowest place at the banquet rather than the place of honor. Today’s Old Testament and Gospel readings also have a tight connection, especially if you know Hebrew.

In Deuteronomy 30, we begin with predictably bad translating of the Hebrew word *shema*. If you have been in Bible class with me, you know where I am going with this. Very often, when you come across the word “obey” in regard to the commands or Word of God, understand that the legalistic concept of “obey” is not the focus of the Hebrew word “*shema*.”

It means to “hear.” “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God; the Lord is one” – the “great *shema*” from Deuteronomy 6. It means to “hear, listen, guard, keep, cherish” God’s Word of Law and Gospel. It can mean “obey” but that is not a primary definition. It is not “obeying His voice” but “hearing His voice, listening to His voice, and holding fast to Him” [Deut. 30:20] – the

same way we desire our children to listen to our voice and do our will out of love and honor for their father and mother. Instilling fear has its place – both with parents and with God. However, fear of God pouring out wrath upon you is not the foundation of our faith – and neither are our works, you obeying the Law.

Faith comes by hearing, St. Paul tells us. Jesus says, “He who has ears ‘to hear’ let him hear.” Jesus does not say, “Let him obey.” It is love for God created in you by the Holy Spirit, not the fear of hell, that creates faith. The Law of God and fear of hell leads us to repentance. It is part of the equation, but it is not the foundation of our love for God.

Also, just for clarification, when we hear the Lord say in our reading from Deuteronomy, “by keeping His commandments and His statutes and His rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land,” this no longer applies to you or me.

You have the general rules of the 10 Commandments that have always applied to everyone. Cain did not have to have a stone tablet with “Thou shalt not kill” written on it for him to know it was wrong to kill his brother Abel. The Law is written on everyone’s heart.

However, God made a specific covenant with Moses and the Israelites where He handed down very specific rules that governed most all aspects of their life and the punishments for breaking those rules. And He offers great and mighty promises of blessing and prosperity to the Israelites if they keep His covenant and worship Him only.

Honor you father and your mother that it may be well with you and you may live (confusing translation: long on the earth); it actually says, “that you may live long in the land.” (Haaretz: the land). And in Leviticus 20, God promises that if you break the covenant, the land “will vomit you out.” The covenant with Moses is a land contract between God and the Israelites having to do with that strip of land we know as Israel. Much of it does not apply to you or me since Christ has come and established His new and better covenant. However, reading all of those Levitical laws does give you insight into the mind of the Lord. It is still the Word of God, but the word of promise of blessings and curses was specifically for Israel.

When you read the books of Moses, you have to understand this or you will end up in the land of the gospel of Prosperity – which is not the Gospel. On Facebook, there are these ridiculous posts that say something like, “If you believe in God, repost . . . and in 2 minutes He will do you a huge favor.” This is not the Gospel.

The Old Testament covenant that applies to you and me is the covenant with Abraham. God promised that the Seed of Abraham, the Messiah, the Christ would be a blessing to all nations (He would die for all nations that all nations might live), and Abraham believed and his faith was credited to him as righteousness. That is the promise we return again and again to hear in the Word of God. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

God’s Word is filled with a consistent message, a beautiful message, but a message that is challenging for our sinful nature to hear. Our Gospel

reading for today is one of those that I feel a little funny concluding by saying, “This is the Gospel of the Lord.” Because there is not much “Good News” at the end of Luke chapter 14. What we have in our Gospel reading is part of a larger narrative. We hear these words from Luke 14 and they are challenging. Our lectionary series ends our reading for this week with Jesus saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear. But Jesus isn’t finished teaching yet. He continues on in Luke 15 (which we will hear next week) with the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coin. Then after that, Jesus kept teaching and tells the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Notice that He never tells the Parable of “the guy who obeyed all the commands of God and perfectly emptied himself to stand righteous before the Lord.” None of us could find ourselves in that parable. But we hear Jesus say, “therefore any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple.” Then how can I ever be saved?

Jesus continues teaching. You are the Lost Sheep who was sought out by the Good Shepherd and brought safely home. You are the Lost Coin that our Lord was so concerned for that He focused all of His attention on finding you. You are the Prodigal Son who was led to repentance and returned to find a Father who forgave you all of your sin. That is the consistent, beautiful message heard throughout the Word of God. This is the Gospel of the Lord. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Faith comes by hearing. Amen.