

MAKE YOUR LIFE A THANK YOU

Deuteronomy 10:12-22 | Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost | October 24/27, 2019

¹⁴ To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. ¹⁵ Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today.

Jesu Juva!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The old man was a fixture on that pier. Every Friday night until his death he would return, walking slowly and slightly hunched over, with a bucket of shrimp. The sea gulls would flock to him, and he would feed them from the bucket. Many years before, in October of 1942, the man was captain of a B-17. During one mission somewhere over the South Pacific, the Flying Fortress became lost out of radio range. Fuel ran dangerously low and the crew was forced to ditch the plane into the ocean. For nearly a month the captain and his crew fought water and weather, sun and sharks. But there was an even worse enemy: starvation. After eight days, their rations were gone. It would take a miracle to save them.

God sent one. One day, as the captain dozed in the boat, he felt something land on his head. He opened his eyes and could see the shock on the faces of his starving companions. A gull, unusually far from shore, had landed on his head. The gull meant food – if they could catch it. Well, they did catch it. They ate its flesh and used its entrails for bait to catch fish. They were saved because one lone gull seemingly sacrificed itself. The man never

forgot. Every Friday he could be seen—white hair, bushy eyebrows, bent back—feeding shrimp to the gulls. It was his way of saying thanks.

The text before us this morning (evening) is about giving thanks. God has given us the free gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. And he wants us to give thanks. He says to each of us today: MAKE YOUR LIFE A THANK YOU. How? God's Word gives us a simple outline that summarizes very well the thoughts of our text. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.

I. By loving God with all your heart

The history of God's chosen people is one of great contrasts. One the one hand, God's faithful care. On the other hand, Israel's stubborn disobedience. Again and again they got into trouble. Again and again God rescued them. Moses reminded them of this fact: **Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.** God took a family of seventy people, grew them into a great nation, and powerfully delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He drowned their enemies in the Red Sea. And he never forgot his promise

to bring the Savior from their midst. With his mighty acts and gracious promises in mind, the Israelites were to fear, love and trust in God above all things. Did they? Sadly, no. The Lord describes them as “stiff-necked.” Their history is a record of one obstinate act of disobedience after another.

That’s our history too. **What does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?**

Do we always give God what he asks? He demands fear. He demands that we respect and reverence him as God almighty. But often we go days without giving him and his Word a second thought. He demands that we walk in his ways. Be we’d often rather be pioneers. We like to blaze our own trail. We like to do things our own way instead of God’s way. He demands that we love him. But many times we give our heart to someone or something else. He demands that we obey his commands. But at times we think of them as annoying barriers that get in the way of our fun, or mere suggestions that we can choose to take or leave.

Because of their disobedience God’s anger burned against Israel. He had every right to wipe their memory from the face of the earth. My friends, God’s anger burns against us too. For our sins we rightly deserve to feel the heat of his

wrath. We deserve to spend eternity in hell’s furnace. And that’s a fire that never cools.

Keeping all of this in mind, listen to these words: **To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.¹⁵ Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations—as it is today.**

God didn’t need Israel. Of all the nations on the earth, God chose the puniest, pip-squeakiest of them all. He didn’t choose them because they were so big. He didn’t choose them because they were so powerful. He certainly didn’t choose them because they were so obedient. No, his choice can only be explained by one word: Grace. In grace he chose them to be the objects of his love.

It’s the same for us. In spite of the fact that he doesn’t need us, in spite of the fact that he is infinitely bigger than us, in spite of the fact that we have failed him time and time again, in spite of the fact that we constantly anger him by our disobedience, in spite of the fact that we are by nature in every way completely unlovable ... GOD LOVES US! He loved us first! John put it this way: **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins** (1 John 4:10).

My friends, if you ever doubt that God really loves you, look at Jesus. You can see God’s love in the footsteps of Christ. Every one of them was on the right path. Jesus

did everything God's way. He fulfilled God's law in perfect obedience for you. You can see God's love in the crimson blood that poured from his holy veins, blood that paid for every sin, blood that he still gives you in his Holy Supper, blood that he shed willingly for you. You can see God's love at the empty tomb. Jesus was buried there with our sins, but when he rose he left those sins behind. Now they gather dust. They are totally powerless to condemn us, utterly unable to take away our place in glory. Jesus rose for you. That's grace. The unfathomable, unsearchable, unbelievable, mouth-left-hanging-open-in-amazement love of God for undeserving sinners like you and me.

In that grace we find the strength to live a life that is truly a thank you. Luther said this: "The law can show you the way to go, but it can't give your legs the strength to get there. Only God's good news can do that." The good news—the gospel—moves us to give thanks. The good news moves us to obey God's commands. The good news moves us to do things his way. The good news empowers us to make our life a thank you to God.

II. By loving your neighbor as yourself

But Christ's love for us doesn't only have an effect on our relationship with God. It also changes the way we view our neighbors, our fellow human beings. The first three of the Ten Commandments talk about our relationship with God. The last seven deal with how we treat our neighbor. But, of course, how we treat our neighbor is a direct reflection on our

relationship with God. After all, Jesus said, **"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me"** (Matthew 25:40).

So who's our neighbor? Everybody. Even those people that we might find a little distasteful. Listen again to our text: **He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.** ¹⁹ **And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.**

God doesn't want us to show love and kindness only to those who are popular and affluent. He doesn't want us to just be kind to those who are like us. He wants us to show kindness to everyone: the poor, the needy, the sick, the homeless, the imprisoned, the misfit, the social outcast, the foreigner, the physically and emotionally challenged.

So how do we show love and kindness to these people. How do we love our neighbor as ourselves? By giving money to charity? Sure. By volunteering our time in the community? Certainly. But one of the best ways to show love to our neighbors is simply living faithfully in the roles into which God has placed us.

- We can show love to our neighbor by being patient parents and obedient children.
- We can show love to our neighbor by being loving husbands and submissive wives.
- We can show love to our neighbor by being fair employers and

hardworking employees.

- We can show love to our neighbor by being safe drivers and law-abiding citizens.
- We can show love to our neighbor by being caring teachers and diligent students.
- We can show love to our neighbor by being gospel-preaching shepherds and faithful members of the church.

And remember: when we show love to our neighbor, we are really showing love to God, who has given us every reason to do so. **We love him because he first loved us** (1 John 4:19).

In 1860, a ship ran aground just off the shore of Lake Michigan. A young man who worked at the life-saving station waded into the frigid water again and again. He rescued 17 people from the wreck. In the process his health was permanently damaged. Some years later at his funeral it was noted that not one of those he rescued ever returned to thank him. God preserve us from such thanklessness. Rather, empowered by God's love, may we always live our life in thanks, loving God with all our hearts, loving our neighbor as ourselves. And when we fail to give God the thanks he deserves – which happens all the time – let's flee to him again and again for the full forgiveness that our dear Lord Jesus won for us. That's the main reason we live a life of thanks in the first place. Amen.

S.D.G.