

Fourth Sunday in Lent
03/10/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Galatians 4:21-31
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I bring you grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4th chapter.

Conversion to Christianity is often referred to as being born again. Jesus when He is speaking to Nicodemus tells him that he must be born again. Nicodemus responds with silly questions, rhetorical or not, about how one goes about being born of his mother's womb a second time. But that's not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is talking about transformation, rebirth of person not body. The idea of this sermon today is to help you along with that rebirth.

A million and one things cling to the human which cause us to be anything thing but holy and pure in God's sight. If we're going to be saved then our image must be recast. Adam and Eve sinned and forever tainted us with sin. To this point in our lives we've been burdened with that original sin and we've added to our woes with the things we've done displeasing God.

It's Lent. It's established tradition in some churches to give up something for Lent. This is the second time this season that I recommend that if you're going to give up something for Lent, even at this late date, let it be sin. Not soft drinks, or alcohol, or cigarettes, or chocolate, or television, or videogames, or cussing or texting or anything else like that (unless you do it to the point of

sinning, which is quite possible). Instead of giving up trivial things like those I urge you a second time to give up sin in all its forms.

Our Lord wishes to be presented with a bride who is dressed in pure white, holy and blameless. That's picture language for Jesus wanting His bride, the Church, to be without sin presented to Him in purity. That means He wants you, a member of the Church, to be holy and blameless. A good starting point for this might be to imagine all day that Jesus is your observer. That He is there with you as you go about your daily tasks. Imagine that He is watching your every move, even those the rest of the world can't see.

Maybe if you lived all of your life like you do here at church you'd be off to a good start. If you're one of those folks who smile and are polite and patient with people away from Church as you are here then you're well on your way. But for the rest of us who act good and wholesome while we're here in front of members but out there we act like we don't darken the door of the church ever, we'll try this out. We'll try to live a good and decent life before God. Think about it.

Have you ever been driving and gotten irritated with another driver and made a bit of a scene only to find out it's a member of the church or some other person you know? Or you call some place of business to give them a piece of your mind only to discover someone you know on the other end of the line? Maybe you've pocket dialed someone, that means called by accident on your cell, and you're saying stuff that you really didn't want anyone else to hear, yet they do?

Well solve two problems at once. Quit sinning, stop these embarrassing moments and present Christ with His spotless bride. Work to change your mindset.

Think differently and you'll be different. Try harder not to prejudge people. Train yourself not to commit adultery when you see an attractive person. Stop telling off color jokes and looking at evil web pages. Leave gossiping to those who don't attend church. Give a full day's work for a full day's wage. Drive the speed limit. Be nice to your spouse all the time and especially in the morning rush. Be patient and kind with your children and children listen and be respectful to your parents. Say and think only good things about your fellow employees and your boss. Say and think only good things about your fellow students and teachers. Leave church on Sunday mornings without criticizing half the members. When you see someone in need stop and ask them what it is that you can do to help them. Search out your fellow humans who need your time talents and treasures.

Work in soup kitchens at times other than Christmas. Visit nursing homes and their residents for functions other than Christmas caroling. Stop eating so much and exercise better so that you'll live a healthier more productive life. Stop smoking, drinking, and chewing to excess. Give up your lust for money and your coveting of other people's lives and things. Read your bible daily and devote as much time to God and meditating on His Word as you do to the other less important pursuits of your life.

There are millions more things to list but let's be concise: Stop sinning and present yourself to Christ as His spotless bride. Those pangs you feel inside yourself with every sin you commit is your conscience. Stop doing what pricks and damages your soul. Stop sinning, give it up. Do all this and live. Go be a better person. Live as a Christian. (Pause).

I have told you nothing that is a lie or a joke. It's the Law of God. You'll be better off if you do what's been said. God demands that you do it. Do it perfectly and God says you'll live. Are you satisfied with your efforts so far? If not would you be satisfied with your efforts for this coming week next Sunday? Would you be willing to stand before God and present what you've done as justification for why you ought to be allowed entrance to heaven?

You should do better, God demands it in His Law, but do you want to stake your eternal life that you will do better? We do think we can at times. We certainly think we're better at fulfilling God's Law than others are. But we're talking about eternity here. Do you really want to make your salvation contingent on your obedience to God.

God says through Paul to the Galatians and to you and me,

"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written,

*"Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!"*

For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.”

The Galatians were given a false law “Be circumcised so that you’ll be a real Christian.” God didn’t command that. But even if He had our following or our obeying God’s Law can’t and won’t save us. We can’t do it. Our sinful nature says, “No. I will not submit.” Try as we may, and we must try, God commands it, we’ll still get angry when we shouldn’t. We’ll still lust. We’ll still over eat. We’ll still be impatient with spouse, parents and children.

God does say follow My Law. But He doesn’t say ‘The way you will be saved is by following My Law.’ That’s not the promise. God didn’t promise to send someone to help us follow the rules. He didn’t send us a simple example wherein we might watch Him and do what He did and be what He was.

The promise was that He would crush the head of Satan. The promise was that He would be a blessing to all nations. The promise was He would free His people. The promise was that He would die in our place and do what we couldn’t do.

If the promise was the Law (do this and live) then the promise is not a promise of salvation but a promise of condemnation. The Law is a promise of judgment. See in and of ourselves we cannot fulfill the Law of God in this life and even in faith we cannot keep the Law perfectly. Our fall into sin has made the Law our judge and not our savior.

Sometimes we Christians talk of and think about our salvation in Christ as being a one time only deal. And it’s true that Christ died once for all. His birth,

life, persecution, death and resurrection were all one time things. Jesus isn't going to repeat His sacrifice for us, once was enough. Once was complete. As He Himself exclaimed "It (our salvation) is finished.

But our transformation, our being born again is a continual thing. Think about your own life, how often do you sin? Just since you awakened this early morning how have you sinned? Fact is we cannot - not sin. We are sinners. That means sin is what we do. If the Law which says "do not sin" is our savior then we are most truly condemned. But that's not God's promise. The Father promised to send His Son. The Son willing came. He obeyed the Law perfectly. He subjected Himself to the Law meant for us. And then after not making any missteps this perfect Lord died for all of our missteps.

The One who shouldn't have died at all did for those who should have died eternally. It's the great exchange. The sinless One for sinner. The righteous One for the condemned.

We sin often and must be forgiven often and the only way that happens is by receiving the Christ who died and rose again. God made a promise that Christ would come and die for us and then He promised to offer the earned forgiveness to us. The Holy Spirit does just that through the Word of God as it's preached to us, as it's applied to us with water and as we receive it along with His body and blood. We sin continually. Our condition is sin. Thanks be to God forgiveness is offered continuously. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the antidote to our fallen state. He's the answer for our inability to keep the Law. We're saved

because Christ freely sacrificed Himself for us. That's salvation by the promise of the Gospel.

So what becomes of the Law? Like grateful children who've seen the unfathomable love of our Father we respond to that love by striving to do all the things we listed earlier and more. Out of a 'love' response we want to keep God's Law. It's our great struggle to do so. We shed tears and blood striving to keep the Law. But even in the process of the struggle that is this life we admit we have not kept the Law perfectly and we willingly and gladly receive the forgiveness of Christ. In Word and Sacrament God washes us clean with the blood of Christ. We daily and continually emerge as His forgiven and redeemed people. In Him before God we're truly transformed. We're re-made and re-born in the image of Christ

The promise of God is that He saves us. In His stead and by His command I tell you for Christ's sake, "Your many sins are forgiven." Amen.

Now may that peace of God keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.