

Sermon on **Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9** for 15th Sunday after Pentecost
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

We dropped off the kids at school this past week. They were ready – spiral bound notebooks, handwipes, pens, pencils, broad tip/thin tip markers, paint set, expo markers, one permanent marker, and a bucket of glue sticks. It was easier this year than the first time we dropped them off for preschool – their first step into a school day. We had to leave them. They had to go. What do you say to them? Listen to your teachers! Remember who you are! Mommy and daddy love you. Go! Today hear Moses as he sends God's people to the promised land:

Go, Great Nation, and Live the Law of the LORD.

1) Because your Gracious God gives you these gifts.

2) Because his commands are a blessing to all.

“Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you...Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”

Go, Great Nation, and Live the Law of the LORD because your Gracious God gives you these gifts. Moses had been with them these past forty years in the wilderness. They were at the Jordan and ready to go in and take possession of the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land promised to father Abraham centuries earlier. But Moses couldn't go with. The LORD would allow him to go up on a mountain to see, but Joshua would lead them in. So he speaks to them before they go in. He reminds them of who they are – they belong to God. He had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. They called upon God and he answered them with a mighty and outstretched arm. He was giving them this land by his Grace. They were recipients of Grace, as are you and I – children of God with a delightful inheritance.

When a commander is unable to lead his troops into battle, but must stay back. He must remind his troops to stay the course, to remember their training, to have courage, listen to their leaders, and go. So Moses says, *“Hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may go in and live and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.”* This is the LORD your God. He gives you this way to believe, think, live in this sinful world that will be a true blessing to you and to others. Don't doubt his gifts. Don't forget your training. If the troops are sent ahead and they become disorganized and forget their roles, there will be tragedy on the battle field. Moses says, *“hear, follow”* so that they will live. To do otherwise is a dead end.

Don't mess with this gracious gift as though it is yours to manipulate. Don't *add to it* or *subtract from it*. Sometimes our sinful natures think they can improve upon God's law and we highlight some area where we have felt we are masters of it and have even improved upon it and we puff ourselves up thinking we have reason to boast and look down on others. I do such and such above and beyond my peers. But this quickly takes the heart of God's law away and we look to ourselves as our own saviors, a dangerous dead end. God's law, and our ability to follow it are both gifts from God and no reason to boast.

Often though, our problem is that we subtract, and shave off from God's law bargaining in our minds where we can sin in one area as we please as long as we are nice to people, or come to

church on Sunday, or balance it out. We justify why we get a pass and certain commandments don't apply. A dangerous dead end that seeks to rob us of our faith, and grow self-righteousness and no need for God's grace. Our sinful nature seeks to keep us out of heaven. But Moses reminds you that that is not who you are, at least anymore. You belong to your Gracious God.

“Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?” As you put into practice what your gracious God gives you, you are a witness to those around you. You may simply be living to glorify God and be a good neighbor in the way God outlines, but people will realize you have a God worth following. You have a God who actually exists and who sustains you, answers you, is close to you. They may not see God, but they see you and how God never leaves you nor forsakes you. You have a God who leads, guides, gives purpose and identity. You have a God who calls back, takes back, forgives and sets free to run in his commands. In fact, we can boast more than Moses, that we have our God so close to us that we know where he was born so as to live for us. We know where he grew up, what he said, how he stuck his fingers in a man's ears and made him hear, how he wiped dirt and his own saliva on a man's eyes to make him see, stretched out his arms to have nails driven through them, sacrificing his own lifeblood to save sinners, you and me, to pay your debt with God, assure your forgiveness, to kick heaven's door open for a sinner like you by his cross. And then he rose and even made a disciple stick his hand in his side, and touch the nail marks in his hands to stop doubting and believe. **Go, you Great Nation, and Live the Law of the LORD because your Gracious God gives you these gifts.**

Go, because his commands are a blessing to all. *“And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”*

The nations of this world have only a dim version of the natural law in sinful human hearts, but they don't have the heart of it. You and I have God's own Word of forgiveness and life and also his good will clearly spelled out for our lives. Live it. Don't forget it or let it go. *“Don't forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live.”* Some of them had seen the Red Sea part and after walking to safety on dry land, Pharaoh's army swallowed up and destroyed. They had seen the manna, the water from a rock, the pillar of fire by night and smoke by day. They would soon see the Jordan part, the walls of Jericho fall at the trumpet blast and shout. Centuries later they would see the temple curtain torn in two and reconciliation made between God and man by the cross of Jesus Christ. They would see an empty tomb. And now you see what God has done in your life, and because of it you will see what God has prepared for those who serve him.

Live the gift he's given you. It is a blessing to you and to all around you as you trust God's way and commands are right. He will not hang you out to dry. He will not leave you a sitting duck. And where there is sacrifice, he knows well how to repay and bless. Live it, model it, and teach God's Word to your child and grandchildren. Give of your time, your support, your prayers and offerings that the next generations will learn about Jesus and all God has done for you. Come to God's house because you know you need to be reminded. *“Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget...or let them fade from your heart as long as you live.”* We come to church because we belong to God and we want to worship him, learn and grow in his Word, and know his forgiveness and love and find his power to live his law in our lives. We want to know and we want to grow and we want to show the generation all that God has done for them and his great will for their lives. **Go, you Great Nation, and Live the Law of the LORD because your Gracious God gives you these gifts and his commands are blessing to all.** And you will be ready when school pick up happens at three. You will be ready for this life and the next by God's grace. Amen.