

Trinity 13

I take as my text today, from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians:

To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord my Strength and my Redeemer.

Service, Faith, and Love: that is what ties the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel together, for seemingly they are unrelated.

While the Collect seems to indicate that the promise of eternal life is a reward for faithful service to God, that is misleading.

Perhaps, it would be more obvious if we approached the Collect from the standpoint of *selfless giving of ourselves* in faithful service; that would better clarify what is meant by *true and laudable service*.

On the other hand, the Gospel points us to **Love** through the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*.

How often do we hear the words: *Love thy neighbor as thyself*. That's a phrase often tossed about and, certainly, heard each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

But who is our *neighbor*? How often do we consider what that means? Indeed, how do we perceive *neighbor*?

In our Gospel, with the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*, we see a perfect illustration of the concept of *neighbor* from the Christian standpoint. The Parable, from the Gospel of St. Luke, provides an answer that so many people do not want to hear; indeed, it gives us a very simple answer: whoever needs me.

Truly, there can be no other answer, if God's **Love** is to flow into and through us; if we have put our faith in God and his Son Jesus Christ.

However, there is something else at play: motivation. What is it that motivates people to be benevolent and loving? Is it a set of laws? Can benevolence and love be codified?

Of course not. Christian benevolence and love are derived from faith. Not a faith in a system of laws, but a faith in God, a loving God.

And that is what we find at the heart of Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

It is not the **Law** that saves us. Our salvation is dependent entirely upon God's **Grace**. It is not something that we can earn. All that we can do is to accept God's **Love** by an act of faith.

Paul was writing to the Church at Galatia, where a certain segment of the Church, known as Judaizers, were claiming that the only way to become a Christian was first to become a Jew.

To this concept Paul was vehement. No, you've got it all wrong, he says to the Judaizers. The Gospel is for the whole world, for the Gentile as well as the Jew. It supersedes, or completes, the **Law of Moses**.

The Judaizers wanted the Christian converts to conform first to the **Law** in order to be brought under the Gospel. Paul says it doesn't work that way, and he goes about refuting the proponents of the **Law** who stood as a barrier to the *Good News* that was Christ.

Was Abraham under the **Law**, Paul asks? Of course not. The law was given to Moses more than 400 years after Abraham.

Rather, it was the **Promise** that was given to Abraham, given to him for his faith, and that **Promise** was to be fulfilled in his seed. Indeed, the **Seed** is the **Promise**, and that **Seed** is Jesus Christ.

It was faith, a sublime act of faith that saved Abraham.

Why, then, the **Law**?

Foremost, the **Law** teaches us what sin is. Without the **Law**, how would we know sin?

God gave us the **Law** through Moses as the mediator. He did not give it to us directly, but through a *mediator*.

Once we came to know, through the **Law**, what sin is, we found out something else: it is impossible to keep the **Law** perfectly. We can never not sin.

So, we also learn from the **Law** our human helplessness. That knowledge, according to Paul, should drive us to seek God's **Grace** through **Faith**.

From Paul's disputation comes to light something most wonderful. It is the **Promise**, the **Promise** made to Abraham. It was not an agreement on law that involves two people. It was not reciprocal. It was a **promise** made. From God to Abraham. One to one. It was God's **promise**. In this **promise** to Abraham, God gave us his **Grace** and **Love**, without which there is no salvation.

We may break the **Law**, but God will never break his **promise**. His **Grace** is always there. His **Love** is ever present. It is ours through **Faith**.

The Judaizers, while accepting Christianity, failed to fully make the connection. They could not let go of the Law but clung to it in futility.

They could not see that it is not the *circumcision of the flesh*, but the *circumcision of the heart* upon which the **Promise** is made.

It is not the **Law**, but the **Grace** and **Love** of God.

It is not the mediation of Moses, but Jesus Christ as our **Mediator** through whom the **Law** is fulfilled, and the **Promise** kept.

It is a **New Covenant** and a *new relationship* with God predicated upon **Love**.

Thus, we are no longer held prisoner to sin, but are freed by God's **Grace** and **Love**. It is the fulfillment of his **promise** made to Abraham, whose **Faith**, in selfless service to God, is a first example for us.

Remember the story of Abraham? How God instructed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his only son. Abraham set out with Isaac to accomplish God's Will. With Isaac carrying wood for the fire on his back, they found a place to build the sacrificial altar. Abraham bound Isaac and placed him on the wood. With knife in hand, as he was about to strike the fatal blow, his hand was stayed. God accepted Abraham's obedience, obedient even to sacrifice his only son, a foreshadowing of God's sacrifice of **his** only Son through the obedience of Jesus Christ to death on the Cross.

For his **Faith**, a **Promise** was made to Abraham. Through the obedience of Jesus Christ, that **Promise** is fulfilled, and a *New Covenant* made.

In this *New Covenant*, sealed in Christ's Blood, a sacrifice of **Love**, we are freed from the tyranny, the slavery of the **Law**, and are given hope in the **Promise** fulfilled, and a share in the heavenly inheritance as God's adopted children.

This is inconceivable outside of Christianity: a sacrifice of **Love** and a **Promise** of eternal life through **Grace**.

We receive that **Promise** through **Faith** in Jesus Christ, and by accepting God's **Grace** freely given.

Proof of that acceptance is demonstrated through the love of our neighbor, and the offering of ourselves as *living sacrifices*.

As God's **Grace** is freely given, so this our sacrifice must also be freely offered. It is our thanksgiving; indeed, it is our bounden duty and service as created beings and as joint heirs to the kingdom of heaven.

Even more, it is the fulfilling of the Promise through Faith — our Faith and God's Promise — and, as our hearts are circumcised through Baptism, we are enjoined to our Saviour Jesus Christ in the **Eucharistic Sacrifice** in which our *self-oblation* is bound to his *eternal oblation* in heaven, as we say in the Prayer of Consecration that we are *made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him*.

The **Promise** made and the **Law** fulfilled through Jesus Christ — our salvation secured through the *Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross*, secured through **Faith** when we offer *ourselves, our souls and bodies as living sacrifices* during the **Eucharistic Sacrifice**.

What is so wonderful is that through our **Service** freely given, our **Faith** freely expressed, and our **Love** freely offered, we receive in abundance God's **Grace** and **Love** freely given and a share in his **Heavenly Kingdom**.