

Trinity 14

I take as my text today from the collect:

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command....

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.

Last week, we were privileged to have the bishop here, presiding over the pulpit and delivering a most compelling look at the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in part relating it to the differences between Christianity and Islam. In particular, we should note the role that compassion plays in both religions — especially, as opposed to Islam, Christianity is the expression of God's overwhelming compassion for all his Creation.

In the Gospel for this Sunday, there is a continuing connection to this divine compassion in the healing of the Ten Lepers.

With this in mind, we may well note that for last Sunday and this, the Collects have centered around the ***promises of God***, while the Epistles have centered around the truth that the Law was powerless to make men righteous.

Taken together, the Collect and Epistle for this Sunday come together to bring a sense of clarity to what course we must take to attain that which God promises.

Truly, God's promises are not rewards, are not something we earn. They are freely given to us and, indeed, through our ***free will***, we can reject his ***heavenly promises***.

The Jewish leadership in the time of Jesus, however, believed that the promises of God could be attained by adherence to the **Law**. To them, the **Law** was a guarantee of *righteousness* — the *be all and end all*.

But our Lord was quick to point out that the **Law** was about externals; it had become a yoke. He had come to fulfill the Law and to remove its yoke.

What do we mean when we say the **Law** was about externals?

In a word, it governed actions — what you could and could not do; how to do or how not to do something.

Think about the **Ten Commandments**. They are very specific ordinances governing our actions. For instance, there are eight *thou shalt not's*, such as *Thou shalt not steal* or *Thou shalt not covet*. And there are two Commandments that concern keeping the Sabbath-day and honoring one's father and mother.

From the **Ten Commandments**, over time, the Law — the **Mosaic Law** — had developed into a convoluted regulatory system. It covered hygiene, food, worship, and on and on. It governed virtually every action of daily life.

So, here we have the **Law**, even when stripped of all its minutiae, a divine legal system to promote order and harmony in a civil setting but lacking the power to make a person righteous through its obedience.

Can you not thus imagine the reaction of the Pharisees when Jesus confronts them with the notion that righteousness is not derived from adherence to the **Law**? That righteousness could not be earned; that it was not a reward? That the promises of God do not come through the outward observance of his commands?

Their reaction was severe and predictable. Their whole way of thinking had been challenged. They found this unacceptable.

If the **Law** was not the way to righteousness, then what was? What is the answer?

The answer lies in the beauty, the simplicity, and yet the difficulty of one word, one concept — **love**.

**....that we may obtain that which thou dost promise,
make us to love that which thou dost command....**

Jesus was explicit about God's command:

**Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart
and with all soul and with all thy mind. This is the
first and great commandment. And the second is
like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.**

If we again think back to the **Ten Commandments**, they do not mention **love**. Yet, they prepared the way for our Lord, and He changed their negative precepts into positive principles of **love** and **duty**.

How, then, can such beauty and simplicity as **love** be fraught with so much difficulty?

Because it requires giving up of self; it requires changing the center of our world. It means taking our intellectual concepts of **love**, of **faith**, of **God**, and moving them from the head to the heart. It requires us to expose, to share our innermost feelings. And it is self-initiated, as the heart cannot be opened from the outside.

If we let the Spirit of Christ into our hearts, everything changes.

St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Galatians:

...if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

He goes on to say:

**...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,
temperance: against such there is no law.**

No doubt that the **Law** is a deterrent; and while it may prevent someone from murdering their neighbor, it, on the other hand, cannot make them **love** their neighbor. It is only the Spirit of Christ, the **Love** of God residing within us, within our hearts that can do that.

Christianity is not all about externals; it is all about internals — what is inside. If our hearts are filled with the **Love of God**, permeated with the Holy Spirit, and the abode of Jesus Christ, that will become externally evident.

The **Law** — the **Ten Commandments** — will read a little differently when **love** is added to each, and the way to **righteousness** will become a little more evident.

For instance, if we take the First Commandment and add *love* to it:

Thou shalt have none other gods but me; thou shalt not love them but love me as I love you.

How about ***Honour and love thy father and thy mother.***

Or ***Thou shalt do not murder; that is, thou shalt not take a person's life or kill his spirit but love him as one of God's creation.***

And, ***Thou shalt not bear false witness again thy neighbor or covet thy neighbor's good fortune, but love thy neighbor as thyself.***

The phrasing may be a little awkward but, as you can see — adding the element of **love** to the **Law** brings to it a whole new meaning that was alien to the Pharisees and Jewish leadership in Jesus' day.

**...that we may obtain that which thou dost promise,
make us to love that which thou dost command...**

Perhaps, you may remember Alice Larison, a faithful Parishioner, now departed this life. Alice would count the number of times I mentioned **love** in a sermon. Then, as she came out after the service, she would take my hand, and tell me the number.

Often, if I had covered the topic well enough, she would kiss me on the cheek and whisper — well, for Alice, it was a whisper — she would say: *Love – that's what it's all about.*

There is the story of St. John when he lay dying. His disciples asked him if he had anything to say, perhaps a message to leave. He replied: *Little children, love one another.*

He repeated this over and over. Finally, they asked him if this was all he wanted to say. In his last breath he said: *It is enough, for it is the Lord's command.*

Indeed, if only we could begin to obey that one command of our Lord and Savior — to **love** one another — that, in itself, would alter the course of the whole world.

*Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the
increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may
obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love
that which thou dost command...*