

Season of LENT

Prayers

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Collect of the Day

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 19 (antiphon v. 8)

Exodus 20:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

John 2:13-22 (23-25)

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 823/824 or 530

Other Hymns – 579 (OT), 865

(OT), 427 (E), 429

For true wisdom in Christ, that the faithful may recognize that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of the world, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Holy Christian Church throughout the world and for all who confess the name of Christ, that God would guard and defend us from the temptations of the devil, the world and our sinful nature, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For a true zeal for the Gospel, that all Christians may recognize the privilege it is to share Christ and comfort others with the comfort we have received, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For a daily return to Baptism, repentance and sorrow for sin, that the old Adam in us should be drowned and die with all evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who have wandered from the faith, that the Holy Spirit would use us to call them home to the Father, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who have been given positions of public trust, that they may use the authority entrusted to them honourably and for the good of the people, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who serve in worthy occupations, professions, arts and sciences, that God would grant them skill and integrity in the performance of their responsibilities and valued service through their vocations, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

cont'd on next page.

For those who suffer from hunger, homelessness, poverty or unemployment, that God's great mercy and love would preserve and relieve them, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all the faithful, that the Spirit would lead them to cheerful, generous giving from the bounty the Lord provides, to support the Church and to help those in need, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who are hospitalised, recovering from surgery, facing chronic pain or long-term health problems, and all who suffer as a result of living in a fallen world [especially _____], that God would grant mercy and perseverance, as well as healing according to His good and gracious will, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who mourn, [especially for _____,] that in their time of sorrow they would not lose hope but rely on God's promise that He will never leave them or forsake them, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

O Lord, heavenly Father, we gratefully remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Rejoicing in His victorious resurrection from the dead, we draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands, interceding for us as our own high priest. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honour and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**



LENTEN SERMON

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

(Series B)

MARCH 3, 2024

Sermon Text: Psalm 19 & John 2:13-22

“The Law Of The Lord Is Perfect”

Grace peace and mercy to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

King David in today’s appointed Psalm – Psalm 19 – teaches us something the world regularly bristles at. For when he, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul”; sinners of all kinds and varieties will be offended by such a statement. And because you likewise are a sinner in need of the mercy of God, like everyone else in the world, there will be times when this is offensive to you too . . . even though the Christian with devout parents or teachers in the faith will have been taught better.

Sinners dislike what is taught here – that “The law of the LORD is perfect” – because they can’t imagine the LORD’s law to be perfect. What is? On the one hand, everything in life has imperfections and daily we see mistakes, flaws and spoilage all around us. On the other hand it can’t possibly be true that the law of the LORD is perfect because it demands that I change my ways in order to keep it. Cynicism, scepticism, pride, and even a deep distrust of anything described as perfect all interfere with the acceptance that “The law of the LORD is perfect” as David teaches.

Instead, the sinner would rather believe that God’s law is not perfect, that men interfered with it or that it doesn’t mean what it says. Did God really say, “You shall not murder,” “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not steal,” ... “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden.”? And so, the old Adam in us will cry out ‘it can’t be murder if it’s not a person’ . . . ‘it can’t be adultery if I don’t physically touch them’ . . . ‘it can’t be theft if they are dumb enough to be gouged in the marketplace’ . . . ‘it can’t be sin if I think it is good for me.’

But these are all falsehoods told to the self to excuse sin or lessen the blow of the reality of the very sin that “is crouching at the door” of every person’s heart with the contrary desire that Sin has to master us all. By such objections . . . and a thousand other ones that you have told yourself in an attempt to make evil small and personally manageable; you and every sinner attempts to sidestep the perfect nature of the LORD’s law. Another common

sidestep is to claim that the law of God is simply an illusion designed to control ignorant people, a relic of an outdated culture which we have outgrown in our modern, sophisticated and advanced life. Yet the law of God is inescapable as St. Paul says, it is “written on the hearts” of all people – even those who did not have it handed down to them at Mount Sinai on tablets of stone by God through His prophet Moses.

If you were to be honest, that sinner within you doesn't like to hear any of this; in fact, you don't like being labelled or called a sinner at all, even though you know it to be true that you have sinned and do sin against the law of God.

Psalms 19 points out another sticky point when David asks, “Who can discern his errors?” Without the law of God, without a preacher or a devoted father or mother or spouse or friend the answer is ‘no one can’ – ‘no one discerns his errors’ – because the old Adam in us seeks to stay hidden in the dark with his sins and seeks to keep you blind to the scope and scale of them. And as you sit in the dark with your sin, I ask you, “Who do you fear? Do you fear your sin or do you fear the LORD?” “As you listened to the Old Testament reading, did you brush the Ten Commandments off or did they terrify you?” “Did even one of them cause you to worry?” “How well have you studied them and contemplated their meaning in your life?” You may say, “Oh, when I was 13 or 14 years old I did when I was in confirmation class.” But I ask you, “What did you know of the world and of life at 13 or 14 years of age? Do you take the law of the LORD to heart now? Do you continue to study it today?”

The perfect and straightforward law of the LORD, given to the people through God's prophet Moses, is described by David in Psalm 19 as “sure,” “right,” “pure,” and “true” . . . and those of you well instructed in the Small Catechism will remember how the explanations of each of the Ten Commandments start. Our dear teacher in the faith, Dr. Luther, starts each explanation with the words “We should fear and love God so that we . . .” But often in our day and age we are told we shouldn't fear the LORD. He's regularly presented simply as our buddy, our pal, our friend; and while in some ways this is very true, the LORD is also all-together holy, without sin, a consuming fire of righteousness. In the fourth verse of the hymn “How Firm a Foundation,” God's plan for you is ‘to consume your dross and refine your gold,’ an allusion to the LORD being a consuming fire of righteousness and a lyrical presentation of the wisdom of Proverbs 17, “The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the LORD tests hearts.”

In Psalm 19 therefore, David says that “the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.” An honest reflection on your sin, given to you as a gift by the Holy Spirit, comes to you as a repentant heart . . . and such a heart grows to understand that, as the book of Proverbs puts it, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” Psalm 19 likewise makes this plain when David teaches us that, “the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.” Every person who is instructed in the law of the LORD, who takes it to heart as the gift that it is for their own good and for the good of their family and their neighbour, is both wiser and better for it. And the good news for you is that God doesn't give His law exclusively to some elite, aristocratic, clandestine group of people. He gives it to everyone from the simple to the high and mighty; and those who embrace this gift are made brothers and sisters in Christ, equally part of the same family of God with the very same access to the perfect wisdom of the LORD.

Again this is not the wisdom of the world; the wisdom of the world champions the “survival of the fittest,” the World teaches that “might is right,” that “the ends justify the means,” that you need to “look after yourself first because no one is going to look after you,” that “what goes around comes around,” that “to thine own self be true.” The world pushes such false wisdom because it cannot abide by what David teaches in Psalm 19. And David is not alone when he highlights this discrepancy between the wisdom of sinful man and the wisdom of God. St. Paul in today’s Epistle teaches us that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men,” that, “in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom,” so, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”

And all this brings us to our Gospel reading for the day and to your Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus. He is the one who followed the perfect law of the LORD that was given to the people through Moses. He followed this law without fault. And He, not David, is the one who embodies Psalm 19. David is not speaking of himself in this Psalm. His fall into sin has been recorded in Scripture as a warning to you and as an example of the forgiveness that is granted to the repentant.

Concerning Jesus, however, St. Peter says that “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth” . . . which is more than we can say for David or for ourselves. It is this very same Jesus who drove all the money-changers out of the temple, along with the sheep and oxen. It was Jesus who poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables saying, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.”

Where we fail to fear, love, and trust in God above all things . . . Jesus did not fail. Where we fail to help our neighbour to improve and protect his possessions and income by stepping in to stop those who prey upon the weak and helpless with unfair and exploitative business practices . . . Jesus did not fail. Where we fail in breaking schemes designed to chip away at what belongs to our neighbour in a way which only appears right . . . Jesus did not fail. And with this one Gospel reading, we see how Jesus was consumed with zeal for the house of the LORD, how He was truly about His heavenly Father’s work – actively working in service to all the faithful who came to the temple in Jerusalem for the Passover celebrations by helping them keep what was theirs and not be robbed of what income they needed to care for their families and community. Jesus was and is no robber. He took none one of what was theirs. He protected people from robbery. He honoured His heavenly Father by keeping His Father’s house holy . . . doing so because He knew that His Father was more interested in “a broken and contrite heart” than He was in false sacrifice – that a repentant heart was more delightful than burnt offerings from a heart with no repentance, and profited by wicked, sinful men.

Dear ones, this is your Jesus . . . Perfect, Sure, Right, Pure, Clean and True. He is the Law of the LORD in action and the faultless fulfilment of it. Such a One cannot be held by death. The day Jesus cleared the temple in total fulfilment of the Law of the LORD, the sinners there – those money-changers and everyone who supported them, all those who had been fleecing the people – hated Jesus for it. His perfect fulfilment of the law of God exposed their sin and drove them to question Him demanding, “What sign do You show us for doing these things?” To which He answered, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” They, of course, scoffed at this . . . seeing it as foolish because what wisdom they had in them was corrupted. So they shot back at Jesus, “It has taken forty-six years

to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” In the darkness of their sin, they were blind to what was about to happen that very week; as St. John explains it: “Jesus was not speaking of the stones that made the impressive temple that they were standing in. He was speaking about the temple of His body.”

Perfection, however, is hated by the world; and the plot to destroy Jesus intensified. By Friday He hung nailed to the cross; and as St. Peter preached on Pentecost, “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” The money-changers, scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees and elders of the people didn’t help and support Jesus in every physical need. Instead, they put Him in the hands of men who didn’t follow the law of the LORD – Roman soldiers. Men who were pressed to bring about Jesus’ death. And yet, “God raised His Son Jesus up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.”

And so, as St. Paul says, “We preach Christ crucified to you, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Jesus’ death and resurrection turns the law of the LORD into a teaching “more to be desired ... than gold, even much fine gold; [a pure and trustworthy truth] sweeter also than honey.” And why? Because Jesus has fulfilled the Law and all its demands . . . even the wages of sin which you owe because of your sin has been paid.

And as Christians, we are now free to study, to follow and grow in this holy Law . . . not because we can keep it perfectly or in order to save ourselves by following it perfectly, but because in Christ the Law of the Lord now serves us. It serves as a protective curb for a warning in our life, an honest mirror for repentance when we sin, and a trustworthy guide for the well-being and good of all people. Christ Jesus now brings us the mercy we sinner so desperately need . . . and with it the “great reward” which He won, not for Himself but for you and for all who trust in Him – the gift of eternal life for on the Last Day death will not be able to hold you because it could not hold Jesus.

Therefore, dear ones, “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”; for in Him your soul is revived and you are free. King David needed the forgiveness and mercy of God as much as you need it. Let your heart then rejoice with David, who teaches you the character and nature of the law of the LORD in Psalm 19. During Lent, as you make your way to the foot of the cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb of Easter morning, continue to reflect on the truth that you and David are sinners in need of Christ Jesus and in Him you and David are more than that . . . for with your faith firmly fixed in Him you, along with David, are forgiven sinners, blessed recipients of the grace and mercy of God. In Jesus you are now counted as blameless and innocent. Yes, it is true: “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.” And Jesus is the faultless fulfilment of that perfect law and He alone is the one who revives your soul. Amen.