

BEING A CHILD OF GOD

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TEXT: EPISTLE = EPHESIAN 4:17- 5:2

We are in the midst of the Season of Pentecost... or more properly the season After Pentecost,formerly known as the Sundays after Trinity.....

..... sometimes referred to as “Ordinary Time” in contrast to the period through Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and ending on Pentecost, which is called “Extraordinary Time.” “Extraordinary Time” so labeled because its chief purpose is to celebrate the specific, historic, supernatural acts of God in history that result in the salvation of creatures and creation. Ordinary Time, by contrast, is more about the Church and Christian growth.

In fact.....Our current Service Book calls it “The Time of the Church”

The season is green = a color of life and growth in nature..... because this is the time of year when the church tends to focus more on our life and growth as Christians. A time we think out our growth in discipleship ... or in our sanctification .. or our growth as a child of God.

In my text (today’s Epistle) the Apostle Paul is writing to the Church in Ephesus...people who already know they have been saved by God’s grace, manifest in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless...he begins his epistle..... reminding them of their redemption in Jesus Christ and reminding them they have been saved by grace:

It is in this Epistle that Paul writes one his most well known statements to us Lutherans...in the 2nd chapter:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, now of works, lest anyone should boast. (Vs. 8-9)

Because of that we can freely do the works that we were created in Jesus Christ to do.....so he goes on in the very next verse to also say:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (vs. 10)

Our Epistle today comes from that part of his epistle that deals with OUR RESPONSE TO GOD’S GRACE.

That’s something we Lutherans don’t talk about very much. We spend a lot more time speaking against responses....against good works....because of the danger of thinking that they earn or merit anything before God. We spend a LOT more time speaking against good works...than actually saying what they are.... than saying how we should live---as a Child of God.

As a result.....I suspect not many Lutheran pastors will be preaching on today's Epistle. It's a text that can be challenging for us. Let me give you an example: I'm confident there have been plenty of good Lutheran sermons based on two of Paul's phrases from 1 Corinthians 6: **"You are not your own; you have been bought with a price."**

Yet...Paul reminds us of those precious truths in order to lead up to specific exhortation that immediately follows: **"Therefore, glorify God in your body."**

To be sure.....it is always helpful to be reminded of who we were and where we would be...apart for God's rich mercy and love, manifest in Jesus Christ.

But we are so no longer! God has redeemed us by his grace through faith....and has made us new creatures in Christ. How should we then live? How should we respond?

In fact.....in the latter half of his letter to the Ephesians (as in all his epistles) ...he is telling believers (those saved by God's grace) how and where we should walk.....orhow to respond properly to the Gospel in our lives.

Paul here....gives guidance to people whose lives are under the reign and rule of God....guided by the Holy Spirit. He gives us actions we can take to help ourselves grow, to bear good fruit, and walk in the Light as the Holy Spirit beckons and energizes us. Paul gives some practical guidance about our lives as redeemed children of God.

He knows we are not-----and cannot be----perfect, but our choices, our behavior do matter.....to God....and to our fellow redeemed. He knows we are saved by grace...not by our own works. But as he says in Romans 6 **"Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?"**

Because we have been made a child of God through God's grace in the waters of Holy Baptism....Paul reminds us we should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk---as the rest of our world walks.... A world he describes as having given itself over to lewdness, to work, to all uncleanness with greediness. That description certainly seems to describe the world in which we live today

Paul echoes what he earlier said in the familiar words of Romans 6 ...that are in the Small Catechism in response to the question of what baptizing with water signifies: **"We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that, like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."**

We should no longer act as a child of this world...a child of darkness. We should no longer walk as the world walks....but walk in newness of life! We should (as Paul says in Romans 6):**"..... not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in lusts."**

We can live differently... NOT out of fear of punishment...OR to gain God's favor.

BUTbecause we are a child of God...because we have been baptized into Jesus Christ....and when we were baptized we received the Holy Spirit.

To use Paul's words... we have been renewed in the spirit of our minds. We have been born again! We have put on a New man (or woman) created according to God...in true righteousness and holiness. We are to live a life appropriate our status.....as a child of God. In our text today.... Paul offers us some practical guidance.

The way we live affects our faith and our relationship with God: The decisions we make....that actions we take....have an influence on what we think and what we believe. It's gradual....and subtle....and it takes a while....but it does affect our minds and spirits. If you stop attending church....if you stop studying God's Word....if you act as if God is unimportant.....He will become that for you.

The way we live..... affects our relationship ...not only with God...but also with each other---for as Paul reminds us in vs. 25 of our text:...in Christ we are **members of one another**. Our relationship to our Lord, and our relationship with each other, are clearly important in our walk as children of God. Paul tells us how we should live and behave....in relation to our fellow redeemed.

Paul begins by telling us as a child of God to **PUT AWAY LYING**. Note, however, ---- NOT because it would violate the 8th Commandant... but because God has given us a new life. ---- there is a difference!

The old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me".... Is only partially true. Words may not physically hurt us.....but they can certainly do emotional damage. Saying something untrue about another person.....hurts that person's reputation.....and relationships. But there is not only active lying.....I think there is also what I would call passive lying ---- where you don't speak the truth to someone who needs to hear it. It as if the eye were to see a trap and not tell the foot....or the tongue to taste poison and not spit it out.

Besides putting away lying.....Paul goes further as says: ***We are to master our anger so not to sin***. We are to be angry at the devil but not our fellow member of the body of Christ. That is why God armed us with the emotion of anger, not to use against ourselves---but against the devil.

Furthermore:***We are not to steal... but rather work, not for personal gain, but that we may be able to serve others***. Again...NOT...because it would violate the 7th Commandment.. BUT because we are God's child. We are not to steal so that we are better able to serve others.

We are to let no corrupt word proceed out of our mouth. Rather what we say to others should be for their edification, And impart grace to the hearer----not hurt them. Reminding us of Dr. Luther's explanation to the 8th Commandant in the Small Catechism: **We should not lie about, betray, slander, nor defame our neighbor.... But defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.**

There is no place for quarreling among the children of God.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you. NOT because it would break the 5th and 2nd Commandments.... BUT because we have received God's grace in our adoption in Baptism.

But don't just root those things out of your life, he says, we must also plant good fruit as well. **Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another—even as Christ forgave you.**

Paul concludes with this summary: *Be imitators of God as dear children. Walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.*

We love God because He first loved us---AND..... we are enabled to love one another because God love us first.

WHEN we do that... we encourage other children of God to do the same....

WHEN we do that... we bear witness to Christ in this darkened world.....that those in it may see the true nature of their deeds....and have their eyes opened.

We know that.... BUT we also know....that it's not that easy! We can identify with Paul when he says in Romans 7: (v. 19) **“For the good that I will to do,....I do not do; but the evil I will NOT to do, that I practice.”**

**BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE SHOULDN'T TRY....OR MAKE THE EFFORT!
And we can ask God to help us we try to live a life pleasing to him.**

We recognize that whenever we pray Luther's Morning Prayer, and say

“I pray Thee that Thou wouldst keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee.”

We also recognize that...when we sing the prayer following the sermon, that we know as the offertory: (Ps. 51:10) **Create in me, a clean heart of God, And renew a right spirit within me....Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me....Uphold me with Thy free spirit.** God does create clean hearts and right spirits within in us through the working of his Holy Spirit.... So that we can live as a child of God.

Let me close with a saying for our Lord Jesus Christ...recording in Luke 17. Jesus described servants who work all day for their master out in the fields with his sheep. Then they come in and is expected, serve the master dinner before receiving their own. Jesus asks: **Does [the master] have grace for his slave because he did all things that were commanded him? I think not! So likewise with you, when you might have done all those things which were commanded, say, “We are unworthy servants, we done what we ought to.”**

At the Lord's Supper,....He is the master who serves His servants. Indeed, he came not to be served but to serve. (Matt 20:28) He tells his disciples: **“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”**

To serve as we have been served. To love another as He first loved us-----this is how we should live as a redeemed child of God.

May our triune God.....give us both the will to do such things...and with his grace fulfill what we are unable to do.