

Lent II - Reminiscere  
 February 28, 2010  
 Psalm 25, Gen. 32:22-32; **I Thes. 4:1-7**; Matt. 15:21-28

Pastor T. Clint Stark  
 St. John's LC-MS  
 Topeka, KS

*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

**For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. (ESV)**

Last Sunday we heard how completely opposed our sinful flesh is to the will and Word of God. Our sinful appetite always wants to indulge in sin. This is why there are many warnings in Scripture to fight against our old sinful flesh. Our Epistle today gives such warnings, particularly warning against sexual immorality.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve had perfect control over their thermostat of sexual desires, and all areas of life. The fall into sin broke the thermostat and it has been completely out of control since. Yes, in all areas of life our sinful desires are opposed to God's Word. We commit sins because we are sinners to the core. It's not just that our thermostat can't keep the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment, but it can't keep any of them. We don't love God with our whole heart, soul, and mind or our neighbor as ourselves. And our flesh is tempted to think this way: "Well, if I can't avoid sinning, it must be OK for me to keep on sinning when and where I please." This is the way of our flesh and a way that the devil likes us going. "Just do what you want and be as god." This is also the way of the world. The world doesn't fear God or fight against sin. And, we don't expect the world to fight against the sinful flesh. So, don't be surprised that pagan gentiles fight to redefine marriage. Don't be surprised that cohabitation in America has increased 700% in the last 10 years.<sup>1</sup> Christians, however, do fight the fight. God never gives anyone a license to sin. Repent, if you think you can go on sinning so that grace may abound.

Why is it so important to be on guard against our sinful nature? Because Scripture does not teach that once you are baptized that you can leave the Church and sin like there is no tomorrow, without consequences. We can fall away from faith. The next chapter in our epistle says, "**Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.**" If you constantly despise preaching and don't come to Church - if you think it is no big deal to get drunk - if you don't fight against looking at pornography - if you live with someone that you are not married to - or embrace any other sin - you grieve the Holy Spirit and are in extreme danger!

The goal of our sinful flesh is to lead us away from Christ and His Word to hell. And let's not forget that our enemy the devil and the sinful world are also in step with this plan of attack. So, if you are living in a gentile lifestyle, you may have a big surprise when Jesus returns to judge you.

God never gives us a license to sin or permits us to sin - never. "...**the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.**"

But what does it mean to fight the fight? Christian sanctification should never be thought of as you and the Holy Spirit alongside each other, as two horses pulling a wagon, fighting the fight. Many churches do preach this way. They say you can eliminate this or that sin, if you just follow certain rules. It is true that we can change our outward behavior. We could pluck out our eyes so that we could never view pornography, but that wouldn't fix the problem of our lustful hearts. But the Law can't help

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<sup>1</sup> This We Believe, Selected Topics of Faith and Practice in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, p. 13.

us become better people. The Law shows us that no matter how hard we try to keep It - we are sinners, inside and out, who deserve God's wrath.

Yes, God promises to punish sin and never gives us a pass, no matter how we justify ourselves. We should fear the Lord. Yet, here is the problem. God never permits us to sin, but we can't avoid sinning -not even for a second. We are legalistic Pharisees if we think we can avoid sinning. So no matter who you are - or what you have done or left undone – we all deserve the same temporal and eternal punishment for our sin.

The second Sunday in Lent we focus on remembering. **We remember the mercy of our Lord and His steadfast love from of old.** We remember that Jesus has indeed died for the sin of the world. The gentile women in our Gospel lesson knew this. She knew that even the dogs get the crumbs from the Master's table. And there is not such thing as a crumb of grace - Jesus died for the sins of all nations. We remember that all of our sins were placed on Jesus. He received God's wrath for our sins of weakness and the sins that have ruled us in the past. By His sexually pure and decent life - by His keeping of all the Commandments – by His dying for all your sin – and by His resurrection from the grave – He has exulted over your enemies of sin, death, world, and devil. Jesus took your place and fought the fight and won.

**“Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD! Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.”** For the sake of Jesus, Holy God declares you pardoned. When we are gathered for Holy Absolution, we say, guilty. Jesus says, for my sake go in peace – not guilty. At the rail we are gathered with great guilt over sin, and Jesus sends us away with a full pardon. It is through Christ's Word, Baptism, Communion, and Absolution that the Holy Spirit creates and feeds your faith, so that you keep on repenting and keep on receiving the forgiveness of sins. Rules and laws can't help our miserable situation. Only the Holy Spirit can create repentance and faith, which receives Christ's righteousness.

Biblical Sanctification properly, is the truth that Christians, by the power of the Holy Spirit, do fight against sin, though in great weakness. You see, God not only gets all of the credit for your justification, but your sanctification too.

The Holy Spirit, through the means of grace, *calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies you, and the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps you with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.* We don't come to church to learn a bunch of steps on how to fight the fight or live the Christian life. Church is not for our entertainment or a place where we simply download Biblical information. Here, we actually are given the Holy Spirit through Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Preaching, and Holy Communion. Here, the Holy Spirit creates repentance and strengthens our faith in the promise of grace in Christ. It is from this good news that we strive to fight the fight in a world of temptation –asking our Father to lead us not into temptation. And because we fail miserably, we are continually reminder here that Jesus never failed to live a holy and sinless life in our place. And it is here that that our trespasses and failures are truly forgiven for the sake of Christ's death. Remember, *on the Last Day He will raise you and all the dead, and give eternal life to you and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true. Amen.*