

Growing Deeper

Daily Devotions
February 23-24, 2009



Written by the staff of St. John's Lutheran Church

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Monday, February 23

Scripture Reading: Exodus 19:7-25

Reflection

It is important to see how God first establishes the relationship with Israel by saving them and then keeps that relationship through the covenant and its laws. In other words, a relationship with God was established not by keeping the law, but as a free gift. Israel's relationship with God originates before the giving of the law in the divine-human encounter between God and Israel at the Exodus.

The giving of the Decalogue is based on the assumption that Israel is already "saved" and in personal relationship with God: "I am Yahweh your God who released you from the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:2). The Mosaic Law was not, and never was intended to be, the means of establishing a relationship with God. Instead, it was a means of regulating Israel's relationship with God that had already been established, being guidelines for those already "saved." Israel's covenant relationship with God did not come because they were so good, for they were a stubborn people (Deut 9:6). The covenant was not granted to them because they were so great, but because God loved them (Deut 7:7-9). The relationship itself was a matter of grace, not law.

The law, rather than being a means of salvation, was a means of helping Israel to become a "holy people" set apart to God, living in holy behavior. The laws prohibit things that are destructive to Israel's relationship with God (e.g. worshiping other gods, moral breeches that offend God). It promotes things that cultivate a proper relationship with God (e.g. festivals, right kinds of worship activities, righteous behaviors that please God). The fundamental obligation of Israel was to love God; the law defines what shape a loving response to God should take. Obedience to the law was an expression of faith that cultivated Israel's, and the individual Israelite's, relationship with God. For Israel, a personal relationship with God places every facet of life under faithful response to God. That is why the laws cover all parts of life: moral, social, and religious. That is why we live in grace – not by law. We live in response to a generous and loving God. The Cross shows precisely why the Law does not create a relationship. A loving God giving His own Son does!

*Loving God, in these days help me to rejoice in the grace given to me
as a gift. Help me not to forget that! Amen*

Written by Pastor Paul Olson, Lead Pastor—polson@stjohns-springfield.org

Tuesday, February 24

Scripture Reading: Job 19:23-27

Reflection

Has there ever been someone you couldn't wait to see? Recently, I flew to Dallas to see my best friend from college. While Joe and I had kept in touch since graduating 10 years ago, he had enlisted in the military and I hadn't seen him in several years because of that. As the day that I would be leaving for Dallas grew closer, the anticipation and the excitement of us finally getting to see each other again was growing. And, being the overly dramatic duo we are, we did the big, splashy airport reunion scene. I couldn't have had a better trip, just because I was able to see my best friend again after such a long period apart.

In today's Scripture reading, Job is longing for the day when he can see God in heaven. How glorious of a day will that be for all of us! Even in the midst of all of Job's suffering, he still anticipates the day when he will join God in heaven. He is still reaching out to his friends and family, trying to convince them of God's goodness and that they need to think about their own judgment day.

How often do you think of that day when you will see God in heaven? Are you like Job, who welcomes it? Or, are you like Kenny Chesney in his latest song:

*Next time you got the good Lord's ear,
Say I'm comin' but there ain't no hurry, I'm havin' fun down here,
Don't you know that
Everybody wants to go to heaven
Get their wings and fly around
Everybody wants to go to heaven
But nobody wants to go now
Someday I want to see those streets of gold in my halo
But I wouldn't mind waiting at least a hundred years or so*

The anticipation of my trip to Dallas was incredible. I couldn't wait to go. But the trip itself was better than anything I could have imagined because I was there with my best friend. And I know that when I get to heaven, that trip will be the trip of a lifetime, because I'll be there with God, my ultimate best friend. Is the anticipation of heaven building for you? Are you getting excited for the day when you will see God?

Lord, give me eyes of faith to hope for what I cannot yet see. Amen
Written by Miranda Bailey, Director of Communications