

The Season of Epiphany

The Sixth Sunday of Epiphany

Serving a Holy God – The Bad News and the Good News

I. THE BAD NEWS

We begin here so that we can understand that THE GOOD NEWS really is good. It's great; the best news you'll ever hear.

THE OLD TESTAMENT - Deuteronomy 30:11-14 The word means "second law" which Moses reiterates to those about to enter the promised land.

First Generation: Despite all the wonders of the Exodus, their faith failed as they longed for "the good old days" back in Egypt.

Result? Forty years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness till all the adults were dead.

Second Generation: A clear choice: obey God's laws = live and prosper; disobey God's laws = death.

Moses' words of encouragement: Deut. 30:11-14 For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

"It's not too hard." That is, it's not vague or hard to grasp; it's not over our heads; it's simple: Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

GOD – the ULTIMATE REALIST A large part of the Law involves an elaborate and detailed system of sacrifices, usually in the form of burnt offerings of animals. The lesson for them (and us): Sin is serious. Sin is costly. Sin is deadly.

THE NEW TESTAMENT – Matthew 5:17; 21-30 Notice, there's still no GOOD NEWS. Not only did Jesus NOT abolish or even weaken the Law, **he reveals its true intent and its deepest intent** – that it's not simply a matter of our **actions** but also our **thoughts** and **feelings**.

II THE GOOD NEWS FROM TWO WHO “GOT IT”

1) **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) Romans 1:17 says the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. But Luther knew (as we all should) that he was not righteous despite his best efforts:

“I grasped that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.”

2) Anglican priest **Augustus Toplady** (1740-1778) “Rock of Ages”

*Verse 1: “... Let the water and the blood, From Thy wounded side which flowed, Be of sin **the double cure, Save from wrath and make me pure.**”*

A helpful picture – a ledger. The debit column is our sins (growing larger every day); the asset side is our “good deeds” our righteousness. Again, we daily “fail to do the things we should,” as if they could “offset” our growing debt.

See 2 Cor. 5:21: “For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” John Calvin called this the “wondrous exchange.”

*Verse 2: Not the labour of my hands Can fulfill **Thy law's demands**....”* Jesus said he came to “fulfill the law” which He did by keeping it perfectly AND by accepting that which God’s law justly demands, namely the death of the sinner.”

Notice how St. Paul uses Moses’ words in our text from Deut. 30 and applies it to the good news of the gospel: Romans 10:4-10: “...Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Is this true of you? Are you at peace with God? If not, may Toplady’s words be your prayer:

Verse 3: Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Saviour, or I die!