

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 27, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 25:1-4, 226:7-8, 369, 284, 412.

Lessons: Isaiah 55:1-11, 1 Corinthians 3:1-11, Matthew 13:52.

Sermon Text: 1 John 2:7-9

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Don't most people want new things? New clothes, new possessions, new entertainment, new ideas?

But how much of what you hear here in church is "new"? What you hear is that same old gospel, the good old gospel message some of you have heard all your lives. "Jesus died for my sins". How easy it is to think in worship service or after worship service "I've heard all this before." blah, blah, blah. Satan wants us to think and feel that way.

Yes, you have probably heard this before. But we really need to be reminded. Think about what you do for a living. Unless you are doing something every single day, you don't always remember what you are supposed to do or how to do something.

When a truly Bible-believing pastor is writing about 60 or more new sermons a year, in a sense we could say that he doesn't really have a new message. I've been preaching the same messages as long as I have been preaching. What John writes is not original thinking. It is what God has told him to preach and write.

Today, strive to pay close attention as

JOHN WRITES NOTHING THAT BELIEVERS HAVEN'T HEARD BEFORE

- 1. If we aren't listening and learning, we are forgetting.**
- 2. The message of the Gospel doesn't change.**
- 3. We need the meat of the Gospel, too, not just the milk of the Gospel.**
- 4. Yet the message is "new" in that it is different from what the world teaches.**
- 5. The one who is in God's light loves his brother.**

We have here a statement that seems confusing. *"Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command."*

If you do something only occasionally, once a month, or a half-dozen times a year, or just a few times a year, you are likely to forget about it. Or if you aren't constantly reviewing facts, you forget the details, and in order to do something right, or to remember something correctly, you need to review, you need to relearn somehow.

But I think and I hope that you all know the importance of digging into the scriptures and reviewing what you have learned, including familiar Bible History. At Christ Our Redeemer we are reviewing the Bible truths of the catechism from Luther's Large Catechism in some of our Bible Classes.

And if you come to church only occasionally, you can easily forget the details of the Gospel message, and that is not good. We forget. We don't remember. Ideas and events and pressures from the world lead us away from the truth of God's Word. Sadly I sometimes find this when talking to people who have been instructed and confirmed in our church, some even quite recently. Sometimes people forget the truths of God's Word. That is exactly what Satan, the devil, wants you to do. People especially forget God's ideas when the world has such ideas that are so contrary to the Word of God. It is especially discouraging when I tell a

Christian again something that they should have heard at least three times in Catechism Instruction, at least once in each year of instruction.

Perhaps when you are working with your children as they learn the catechism and memorize Bible passages, you are reminded of truths from God's Word that you have forgotten! What a great time to refresh yourself – and maybe the whole family! Remember, Luther's Small Catechism was written so that "the head of the family should teach it in the simplest way to those in his household."

And haven't you been told – if you have been instructed and confirmed – that Catechism Instruction is just the beginning; that you now have opportunity to hear and learn on your own?

So maybe the older you get you aren't really hearing much new in church. But that is the way it should be. A truly Christian, Bible-believing pastor is called to preach and teach the Word of God in its truth and purity to people, not human opinion, not "***what their itching ears want to hear.***" (2 Timothy 4:3)

So the basic Gospel is pretty simple. But there is more to the Gospel of Jesus Christ than the milk of God's Word. The milk of God's word says "Jesus died for my sins." A three-year old can hear and realize that. "Jesus died for my sins." But a child may be five or six years old before beginning to realize what "my sins" means, the sins that Jesus died for, the sins that everyone commits. And we may be much, much older before we realize how that affects our entire sin-filled lives.

"Jesus died for my sins". But there is more than just those five words to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Although Peter says "***Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good,***" (1 Peter 2:2-3) you must also have the strong meat of God's Word.

In our epistle lesson you heard Paul write to the Corinthian Christians that they were not yet ready for the strong meat of God's Words.

And in the fifth of thirteen chapters the writer of the letter to the Hebrew Christians admonishes them "***in fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.***" (Hebrews 5:12-6:1) If the readers and hearers had really chewed and digested the first 5 chapters, they really should, by now, be devouring the strong meat of God's Word.

And what about us? How much of the strong meat of the Gospel do we just plain not know? How much of the strong meat of the Word of God do we forget, because we are so immersed in a culture and society that has no use for Jesus Christ?

Let me give just one example of how society's morality – or lack of morality! – influences even the laws of the land. The United States Supreme Court has succumbed to the philosophies that those who chose to practice homosexuality should have the same "rights" as a man and a woman do when they marry. It has been written that Americans have changed their views about this sin which the sacred scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all condemn as an abomination. One supporter of the Supreme Court's decisions about homosexuality responded to a minister's quoting the Bible's condemnation of the sin of homosexuality with the simple statement "My god does not agree with you." (The O'Reilly Factor, June 26, 2013) We live in a society in which many have created their own god or gods.

How true doesn't that get to be! So unless we keep hearing that old commandment, that old Word of God we are not going to remember it and it will not be part of our lives.

John writes here of a new command which isn't really new. He heard Jesus' words on Maundy Thursday when Jesus said "***A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.***" (John 13:34-35) God's demand to obey his will is not new. What is new is that in Jesus Christ all of God's laws and will were kept and obeyed.

John says this is not a new command: "***Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in [Jesus].***" Yet this is really an old commandment, which you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the Word which you heard. It is not a new, strange, unheard-of commandment or laws that he is writing about.

It was an old precept, one which they had heard from the beginning of their Christian life. John was explaining to them the Word of God as they had always heard it, from all their teachers; because all the apostles and their assistants preached the same truth.

In spite of the fact that it was the old, old truth which he was proclaiming, he could nevertheless write: again, a new commandment I am writing to you, what is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is even now shining. Jesus had come to bring light into the world. Jesus himself and Peter in the New Testament speak of Jesus as a light shining in a dark place, as the Morning Star.

God's truth does not change. It always remains the same. But John says that, from another angle, from another point of view, the doctrine, the special precept which he has in mind is a new commandment. The form in which he is presenting it and the vehemence with which he is insisting upon it arouses new interest for it. The precept is contained in the revelation of Jesus Christ. It has been fulfilled in him, and it is proved in the experience of believers.

Christ truly loved his brethren and in that way left us an example of true brotherly love. In him there was never any darkness. There was never anything hidden or secret which requires special learning or membership in some kind of secret society.

The truth Jesus brings ***"is seen in him and you – all believers – because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness."***

Jesus is light, and his followers seek the true light. But in the case of us Christians it is also true that the former darkness of sin and selfishness is passing away, and the true light from God is shining on us and shining from believers. Our hearts have been enlightened by the beauty and the power of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and in this power we are beginning to renew the image of God in our hearts. And although the shadows of sin are still found in our lives because of our sinful nature, we know that they will be fully and finally driven away when the sun of eternal life will arise upon us. That will take place on the glorious day of judgment, when all who believe in Jesus will be taken to eternal life.

One who has true faith lives in the light of Jesus. One who loves his brother lives in the light of Jesus.

Obedience is an unmistakable part of true faith. True faith is always accompanied by a believer's willingness to submit to the will of his God. True faith accepts God's authority over one's life. Obedience to God's will is not new. What is new is that in Christ all laws of God were kept. God then imputes that perfection to us!

Jesus is the bright heavenly light appearing just before dawn. That signals that the darkness is almost over and daybreak is near. Christ's holy life and innocent death are new – they demonstrate conclusively that the power of sin and Satan are broken. The old way of sacrificing bulls and lambs and goats is over, because they only pointed forward to Jesus' perfect sacrifice for all sin.

In a moment we will sing ***"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit."*** (Psalm 51:10-12) Only God can create that heart and spirit within us. Only God can give us joy in his salvation and uphold us!

May that true light of Jesus Christ shine on us.

May that true light of Jesus Christ shine through us to all we come in contact with.

May the old message of the truth of the Gospel always be new and fresh in our lives. Amen.