



THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proper 4

Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

29 May 2005

Pastor Kevin R. Maly

Deuteronomy 11:18-21, 26-28

Psalm 31

Romans 1:16-17; 3:22b-31

Matthew 6:21-29

From Moses: Here are God's commandments. Bind them upon your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead; teach them to your children; write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. If you do them, all will be well—your days and your children's days will be multiplied, and you will receive blessings upon blessings. But if you don't do them—a curse upon you. These words of Moses are the conclusion of a particular set of commandments in the previous chapter of Deuteronomy. The commandments are these: love and worship the Lord God, care for the widow and the orphan—those without status; and love the alien within your land—provide food and clothing for those who do not have the rights of citizenship.

Interesting. We hear a lot of blather these days from politicians, public pulpiteers, and presidential wannabe's that we are a country founded on Judeo-Christian principles. All right, if that's the case why are women without husbands and their children those most likely in this country to suffer the effects of poverty—namely lack of quality education, of access to health care, of adequate nutrition? And what about undocumented workers—mostly from Mexico and Latin America? If we truly are a country guided by Judeo-Christian principles, why aren't the fundamentalists and the so-called Religious Right working overtime to rectify a system wherein single women and their children have little hope of climbing up from a nearly permanent underclass status? If the fundamentalists were truly interested in Judeo-Christian principles guiding public policy, they would be enthusiastically supporting President Bush's efforts to initiate a guest worker program that would be a large first step toward insuring that the non-citizens in our midst might be accorded the rights and responsibilities that are justly due them as human beings. The commandments in Deuteronomy are clear—you must give special care to widows, orphans, and non-citizens from other countries. So, how come no hew and cry from the fundamentalists or the religious right on any of this? Miserable hypocrites.

We hear Jesus say in St. Matthew's gospel this morning—those who are hearing Jesus' words and are acting upon them are like a builder who builds upon a rock—when the tempests come, the house built on a rock will stand; by contrast, those who hear Jesus' words but are not acting upon them are like a builder who builds a house on sand, when the tempests come, the house will fall apart. These words come after Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. There, among other things, we hear that we are to love not only the neighbor, but that we are to love our enemies as well. We also hear that we are not to judge anyone, but are to look to our own lives and what we are or are not doing. Well, that certainly takes all the fun out of bashing the fundamentalists and ragging on the religious-right. Seems I'm planted squarely upon a patch of sand and sinking fast.

What's a person to do? All of us fall short of what God wills for us to do and to be. If we are honest, when we measure ourselves against how Christ says we are to treat the neighbor, the enemy, the fundamentalist, the single mother and her children, and the undocumented worker—we're all guilty. Seems there is no distinction between the fundamentalists and us. And as far as having no other gods than the Lord God—well I have lots of other gods—my possessions, my looks, my intellect, my personal comfort and security—shoot I could go on all day with the list—and I'll bet most all of us here could too. If our standing with God is up to us . . . we're all sunk, we've all built not just on sand—but quicksand at that.

But thanks be to God who has assured us in Christ Jesus that our standing with God has nothing to do with what we do or do not do. In God's eyes we are as Christ—completely righteous, complete innocent, perfectly fulfilling God's will to love the neighbor, the stranger, the enemy as ourselves. Just trust that it is so, says Paul. Allie, allie in free! Free lunch, for everyone!!—for those who do good and for those that aren't so good at doing good. No hierarchy in heaven, no boasting. Everybody the same in God's eyes—perfectly perfect.

Why then have commandments? Why care for the single mother and her children, why care for the illegal alien, why pray for our enemies and love them as treasured companions? Easy. Because that's who we are. In Holy Baptism, our old selfish selves died and our new Christ self arose. And like Christ, we love and care for all people—because that's who we are. That simple. We do good for the sake of the neighbor and the neighbor's well-being. We don't do it for God, for Christ, for our own good; we don't do good to win people to Christianity—we do good to all for their own sake. Period. That's what people reborn in the image of Christ do. End of discussion.

But we also need to hear God's commands, God's law, so that we don't start to think that on our own we're any better than anyone else. Our old selves daily get in the way of who we are in God—every day we fail miserably in our calling to love the neighbor—be that neighbor friend or foe. Just by virtue of living in the richest, most powerful country on earth, we are part of a system that seems destined to trample on the poor and the needy. Just by virtue of living in a petroleum dependent culture, we are guilty of trashing God's good earth. Our houses are stuck in the shifting sand of myriad situations too often beyond our control. We need to hear God's commands, God's laws, and we need to acknowledge our own selfish nature in order to realize that none of us is any better than the rest of us—that none of us, left to our own devices is anything but a lousy builder whose house is a total wreck. Repentance is to say: I can't—on my own I can do nothing but build on sinking sand.

But God does not leave us in sand among the sopping wet ruins. You're not guilty in my eyes, says God. You're perfect. You are as Christ. Like Christ, you do perfectly trust God, you do perfectly love God, you do perfectly love the neighbor, you do perfectly love your so-called enemies, you do perfectly work for justice for those who have less, you do perfectly feed and clothe the undocumented worker. The remains of your ramshackle house have been hauled to the land fill and a new one has been built *for* you—on solid rock—by the master carpenter—and when the rain and winds come—as they shall come to all of us—it shall not fall.

Now, come to the table—receive Christ that you may be Christ. And then get out of here. Enjoy your new house.