

The Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost
September 9, 2012
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

"Talk is cheap!" Perhaps we say this and feel this way because of the consumer age in which we were brought up. Everyone is trying to sell and tell us that they have the best products which we need and cannot do without. Perhaps we feel this way as another politician makes promises that are not always in line with the facts. *"Talk is cheap!"* Perhaps we say this because all of us know what it is like to have someone tell us one thing and do another. Maybe we feel this way for all of us have felt the hurt of promises broken. People talk and talk and make promise after promise all the time. So what are words to us? *"Talk is cheap!"*

Yet, wouldn't we all agree that some words are more important than others? If you are about to climb a mountain for the first time it would be good to listen as the guide explains the safety procedures and the best route to get you to the top. If you are beginning a canoe trip and the instructor says: *"Listen up, when get to this point make sure you go this way or you will head for the waterfall,"* it would be wise to pay attention to his words. For all of you students back in school I'll give you a helpful tip. When a teacher tells says, *"You will need to remember this because it will on the test,"* you might want to listen to those next words and even take some notes. Some words are important and to be taken more seriously than others. A life can even be lost if certain words are ignored.

God gives us the most important words! His Words stand far above any others and are much more valuable than what anyone has to sell or tell us. The nation of Israel was truly blessed to have a Lord who faithfully taught, guided, comforted, and directed them with His Words. So are we! Before we feast on the food together this morning at our picnic may we use this time to be fed by the only words which give life! As we do I pray we realize God's Words are to be taken seriously because: **God Is Serious about His Word!**

Moses, in the first few chapters in Deuteronomy, shows how Israel is blessed when they listen to the Lord's words and take them seriously, and how they run into problems when they fail to listen to the Lord's words. When they listened to God's Word God faithfully provided for them & nations were delivered into their hands. But they haven't always listened. For example, God tells them to go in & take the land of the Canaanites. But Israel says the people there are too big and strong. They do not listen to God's promise. They don't take the word of the Lord seriously. So the Lord says no one will enter the land except for Joshua & Caleb who trusted in the Lord's Word. Then the Israelites change their minds & want to take the land, but God tells them He will not give them the victory. Again they are not serious enough when it comes to God's Word; they don't listen and attack and

are brutally defeated. God is serious about His Word. Even the great prophet Moses points out his own sin of when he did not take God's Word seriously enough. The Lord told Moses to speak to the rock at Meribah but in His anger he hit it to get water. Now the Lord would not permit Moses to enter the land either. Yes, God is serious about His Word!

And now, a new generation is about to enter the Promised Land. Moses asks the Lord once more if he too can cross the Jordan with the people into the land. The Lord's answer and word is still no, but He does take Moses up on a mountain to see the land. God tells Moses to ***"encourage and strengthen Joshua"*** to lead His people into this new land. He does with these words before us: ***"Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you."*** Moses is going to repeat the commands the Lord gave to His people at Mt. Sinai. Just like we saw there in Exodus these commands come from a God who loves them and has provided for them with His grace. Moses reminds them this is the Lord, the God of your fathers, who is giving you the land. This is the one whose words they are to trust all the time. Moses tells them to listen and follow the Lord so they may live and take the land.

But what commands of God are most important? After all, open up the next chapters of Deuteronomy and read. God has a lot to say to His people - a lot of rules and commands to follow. Certainly, some are more important than others. Some can be taken with a grain of salt, right? God speaks so many words how do we know which ones God really wants us to listen to and follow and which ones we can set aside? Listen to the Lord answer this question for us: ***"Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you."*** God's words are not to be messed with, they are not pick and chose items, they are not words to play around with – this is the Word of the ***"Lord your God."*** God makes it clear throughout the Bible that we are not to add to it or subtract from it. Solomon puts it this way: ***"Every word of God is flawless...Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you to be a liar"*** (Proverbs 30). Not only does Moses, who writes the first five books, warn us about tampering with the Bible, but so does the apostle John who writes Revelation, the last book in the Bible. ***"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if any takes away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life"***(Revelation 22). God is serious about His Word.

This is a truth we need to hear repeated again and again and again. Because today God's Word is far too often treated like an all you can eat buffet – take the things you like and leave the things you don't. Too often Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in our Gospel lesson is still needed as tradition trumps Scripture and people teach what Jesus calls: ***"rules taught by men."*** Can you think of examples of how people add to God's words today? Some teach God says: ***"Do not drink. Do not smoke. Do not dance. Do not play cards for money. Do not eat certain foods. Choose God. Do your best and God will be satisfied. You just need to have faith in something because there are many ways into heaven."*** Where does God say these things in His Word?

Many also need the rebuke Jesus has for the Pharisees as they took away or subtracted from God's laws which they failed to keep. Jesus says they ***"Let go the commands of God."*** Now think of examples of how people subtract from God's Words & conveniently take an eraser to certain sections. We don't want to offend anyone so how can we repeat God's words that ***"Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor homosexual offenders... will inherit the kingdom of God"*** (1 Cor. 6). We don't want to put other worldly religions down so we will remove the Lord's words that ***"Salvation can be found in***

no one else, for there is no other name under heaven (but Jesus) given to men by which we must be saved(Acts 4). In our adult Bible study next week we will begin a study that looks at the sad results of how many people view the Bible by rationalizing and determining for themselves what to follow and what to ignore.

Dear friends, do not think we are immune from doing the same thing! The devil is constantly trying to get us to change the Words of God. He wants us to add our own laws so that we are filled with sinful pride – thoughts that we are better than others – thoughts that we are good people who can save ourselves. Satan wants us to change God’s Word so we think we can keep it all by throwing away the things that point out our sins. He doesn’t want us to realize that we like Israel fail horribly when it comes to keeping all God’s commands – he doesn’t want us acknowledging the truth that we are poor miserable sinners who desperately need God’s mercy and grace. The devil doesn’t want us to see that by ourselves we are on a path to hell.

The devil most of all wants us to change God’s Word because he realizes the main purpose of all God’s Word? John writes: ***“These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”*** (20). God’s Words are much more than a guide to follow and a handbook on how to live. These Words reveal Jesus and God’s plan of salvation through Him. God gives us His Words not to burden us, but to show us how Jesus kept God’s laws perfectly to remove that burden from us. These Words show us more than how to avoid sin, they show how Jesus suffered and died on a cross to endure the punishment for our sins. They show how Jesus comes out of His grave to take all fears of eternal death away for us. The Bible is much more than a book to prepare for life – it is a book that gives us life, even eternal life.

Yes some words are more important than others! God’s Words are always to be taken seriously for God is serious about His Word. Thank God that He is – for these are the words of eternal life – the only words given to us so we may live and one day take possession of a promised land in heaven far greater than Canaan. God is just as near to us as He once was to Israel for as Paul writes: ***“(God’s) word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart”*** (Romans 10). So listen to the Lord and His Word. Listen as Moses says about His words: ***“Observe them carefully for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who hear about these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. What other nation is so great as to have their gods near to them the way the Lord our God is near to us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?”*** Israel was richly blessed and so are we! Who else has a God like ours – a God who gives us His own Words – a God we can reach for and find every time we pick up our Bibles – a God who guides, comforts, directs and saves us by His Word! Talk is never cheap when God is speaking to us. Amen.

