

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 19, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Exodus 32:7-14

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. (NIV)

Do we take anyone's words totally serious anymore? When a politician makes a promise, when a meteorologist forecasts rain, do we take them seriously? One of the golden rules as parents is to follow through on what you say or children will quickly learn that our threats and warnings and promises are empty words. Before long kids won't even take the words of their own father or mother very serious. So are we serious about words anymore? Does anyone always say what they mean today? Can we find anyone who speaks words that we need to consider as absolute truth?

The answer is a resounding "yes!" There are words that we need to take very serious. There is Someone who always says what He means. There are words that are never empty and are always the absolute truth. Of course, I am speaking about the words of our one true God. When God speaks we need to listen. His words are words to always be serious about because as we learn from this lesson in Exodus: **God is Serious about His Word. When He condemns with His law. When He forgives with His gospel.**

Do you remember the history of the people Israel up to this point? God had graciously kept His word to Abraham. He chose them out of His grace to be His people and treasured possession. He made them into a great nation. God rescued them with His mighty hand from their misery and slavery in Egypt. God miraculously and carefully protected and nourished and guided them through the wilderness safely to Mt. Sinai. At this mountain God again spoke His word to them. He gave them His law and 10 commandments to bless and guide them. After initial fear from all the fire and smoke the people said what they heard was good. They promised with one loud voice to obey their loving God in everything.

But Moses had been on the mountain with God for 40 days. Do you recall what the people of Israel did? Do you know what they did with the words of their God who saved and protected and guided them so miraculously to this mountain? They did not take His word very serious. In fact, they openly disobeyed the very first command God gave them. Can you imagine the look on God's face as He gazed upon His own people bowing low before a metal cow and chanting: "*O golden calf, you are our god who rescued us and brought us up out of Egypt?*" Can you imagine God's disappointment and rightful anger?

How could this chosen people not take the words of the one true God seriously? God did not give just some good suggestions. The holy God had given them His commands, and they broke the first one. Listen now to how serious God is about His word. "***Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people." "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."***

The Lord says He wants no part of these sinful people who were so quick to disobey His word. The Lord tells Moses that they are "***your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt.***" The Lord calls them a stiff-necked people who cannot be turned. They are more stubborn than a mule. God tells Moses to leave so that His anger may burn against them. He threatens to do away with them completely and make Moses into a great nation. God's anger is burning. His word is serious. His threats are real. His holiness cannot tolerate sin.

Are we any better than these Israelites? Think of all the Lord has done for you and me. Yet, what have we done with His words? Have we ever turned God's commands into suggestions that we can take or leave? Are there ever times we don't take God's laws all that seriously? We are guilty - even of sinning against God's first command. We have loved other things more than God. We have feared other things more than God. We have trusted other things instead of God. We have, at times, put our own thoughts and feelings and wants ahead of God's words. So we need to listen up to what God says to Moses because God is dead serious about His word. His law condemns us. The wages of sin is death. We deserve to die - eternally. We deserve to be punished - eternally. God is serious about His word. His warning and threats are not empty.

Thankfully, Moses understood just how serious God is about His word. Thankfully, the Lord gives Moses a test, an opportunity, a chance to intercede, before acting on what these people deserve. Moses passes the test. Moses doesn't just leave so that God's anger would burn against these people. Instead, Moses boldly holds God to another word He had promised. The Lord made some promises to Abraham. The Lord's name was at stake here, the name of only true God - the God of free and faithful love - the God of the covenant. Moses did not want that Name to be mocked among the Egyptians. So Moses appeals to the Lord not on basis of who these people are or what they have done, but on the basis of who the Lord is and how serious God is about His

word. Moses simply points to Lord's promises and how because of the Lord these Israelites were His people and His nation.

And do you know what the Lord did? Do you know just how serious God is about His word? ***"Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened."*** That's how serious God is about keeping His word. These corrupt people deserved to die and immediately be wiped from the face of the earth. But God had made a promise to them. God would keep His promise. The Lord would remain faithful even to an unfaithful, sometimes even faith-less, people. The Lord would be patient with them and give them time to repent and turn back to Him. Most importantly, He would keep the promise to them through which all nations would be blessed - the promise of sending a Savior who would provide the forgiveness for every repentant sinner. God is serious about His word.

Have you and I not witnessed the same thing in the way the Lord deals with us and our sin? How many times have we deserved to be immediately wiped off the face of the earth? Yet the Lord has been patient with us. He sent you and I a greater mediator than Moses. You see Moses here serves as a type of Christ - a beautiful Old Testament picture of what is now a New Testament reality. Our mediator not only speaks on our behalf but He became the payment for our sins. Jesus, by His life and death and resurrection, guarantees our forgiveness and salvation. Now as we read in John's first letter: ***"I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*** (1) Now as the writer of Hebrews explains: ***"He (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."*** (7) When we sin Jesus stands before God the Father and says: ***"Do not count their sins against them. My blood has washed them clean. Hold to your promise for my sake and forgive them. They are your people and you are their God."*** God's promises to us are just as sure as they were to Israel.

If we want to see just how serious God is about His word we need to look no further than the cross. There we see just how serious God is - about how much He hates the sinner - about how much He loves the sinner. Look to the cross where Jesus was forsaken to see just how real it is when God condemns with His law. Look to the cross to see the blood of God's own Son being poured out for sinners to see just how serious God is about providing forgiveness for the sinner.

God is serious about His word. Let us also take His words seriously. God always means what He says. Sometimes that can be a little frightening when He condemns with His law. But how comforting is the fact that God is serious when He forgives with His gospel. When God says our sins are forgiven - our sins are forgiven! We have words we can always look to as absolute truth - words we can always trust, promises that will never fail. As the apostle Paul declares: ***"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."*** (2 Corinthians 1). Amen.

