

*Sermon for the Second Sunday after Pentecost, Memorial Day Weekend, 29.v.2005, 9:00 a.m.  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
Deuteronomy; Psalm 3:1-5; Romans 1:16-17; 3:22b-28[29-31]; Matthew 7:21-29  
Ante-Communion, LBW - Setting 2*

**J. J. !**

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and  
Who is to come! ☞ Amen.

***[Jesus said]: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock . . . . And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.” — Matthew 7:24,26***

When the city, county, state or federal government undertakes a building project, the agencies in charge are usually required by law to let bids on the project and to award the contract to the lowest bidder. Private businesses or individuals, by contrast, sometimes do just the opposite, contracting not with the provider offering the lowest bid but rather with that contractor who is the most competent and trustworthy and who will not understate the costs. My grandfather built his general contracting business on that basis, building houses, outbuildings and improvements for ranchers all over South Texas. The ranchers knew that they would never end up paying more than my grandfather had estimated, and that the final

bill would sometimes be a lot less. They knew also that my grandfather would more likely than not finish the project ahead of schedule. This was in part because the men who worked for him were good about showing up on time and putting in a hard day's work. They did this because of the way my grandfather paid them, with higher wages than they would get in construction anywhere else around, and because of the way he treated them, with dignity and kindness, remembering that he had learned all he knew about building as an apprentice carpenter at his own father's side.

Though my grandparents never grew rich, my grandfather's approach to work and to people sustained their business and their name for nearly forty years. I can still remember what it was like being introduced as his grandson in that country, even after he had passed away. The honor of his memory was placed on my shoulders, though I had done nothing to deserve it. The honor of his memory is still something I aspire to, though I doubt I will ever attain to it. My grandfather had built his working life on the firm rock of honesty and skill and respect for the people he worked for and the people who worked for him.

Would that the one who took over my grandfather's business had understood. Taking the exact opposite approach to both work and people, he lost all of my grandfather's customers within just a few years. The cheap strip malls he built in a city far away from the small farmer carpenters, electricians, bricklayers and laborers of Gonzales County who had worked for my grandfather are his only memorial. One man built his working life upon the rock of integrity, the other upon the sand of selfishness and shortsightedness. One man's name endures in blessed memory, the other's only in pity, when it is thought of at all.

I think often in these days of Pope Benedict the XVI, called to be Bishop of Rome and pastor to all Christians, called to be the successor of Simon, that rough Galilean fisherman whom Jesus renamed 'Peter,' 'rock,' because of his daring and firm faith. Pope Benedict must have many days and hours in which he does not feel very rock-like at all, dark nights of worry for the Church in which that great rock of Peter must feel like the weight of the world instead of a firm place on which to stand. The memory of his immediate predecessor must be a comfort to him, though, for surely the whole

world saw in John Paul II how weakness can become strength. Through his example and, as many believe, through his prayers, I pray that this new 'Servant of the Servants of God' will daily find the strength to *live* the firm confession of the Church's faith he is pledged to serve and to defend in open and critical dialog with the world.. May he one day leave the Church a legacy of discipleship as solid as that of the one who went before him.

On the day Israel was about to leave Moses behind and to follow Joshua's command as they crossed the River Jordan into the Promised Land, the old Lawgiver ordered the people to treasure and to teach God's Commandments to all generations to come, placing before them a choice between life and death. They– and we– face that choice each new day, the choice between a superficial keeping or an authentic *living* of God's precepts of justice, honesty, respect and mercy. Not just in speaking but in both understanding and in *living* those words do we live our lives in that Triune faithfulness and love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Not just calling out "Lord! Lord!" in our confession of faith, in our prayer and in our worship, but living under the Lordship of the Triune God will make the

difference in whether our names live forever in God and until the end of the days of those who knew us or whether those names are cast aside in pity or in disgust.

Today and tomorrow, across our country, those who stop to observe 'Decoration Day,' Memorial Day, will remember the names of their dead, where possible at their places of burial, where stones or plaques bear those names. They will remember also, wherever they are, and wherever those who fought in defense of this nation have fallen and are buried, the sacrifice of lives that could have been lived otherwise, lives mostly of the young, lives lost in war but remembered in the peace their blood purchased. They gave those lives in the conviction, or at least in the hope, that the freedom of this people, or at least the interests of this nation were worth giving everything for. If it is not so, if the freedoms of this people they fought and died for are allowed to decay, and if the interests of this nation are not noble but narrow interests unworthy of their blood, then that is our fault and our sin, not theirs.

At another and higher level, millions of those who have given their lives for us and thousands of those who now serve for our sake

have heard the call to base their lives on a foundation that is as firm and strong as the hardest stone. It is the same call the Holy Spirit has been speaking to you since your Baptism and to me since mine. Choose life! Choose to live the eternal life of God in the short span of days you have in this life, instead of focusing in regret on what was or might have been! Choose to be light on the path of others as you go ahead of them in courageous joy! Choose to base what you have on the blessing and grace of God, not on what you can take that is not yours and your name will live forever in the Church of Christ built on the solid rock of faith. ✎Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit both now and forever. ✎Amen.

**S. D. G. !**