

Sermon for the 13th Sunday after Pentecost (B), Proper 17, 3ix2006
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
08:30, Holy Eucharist – *Missa Brevis* / 10:00, Holy Communion Liturgy, LBW Setting 2
Deuteronomy 4:1-2,6-9, Psalm 15, James 1:17-27, Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

J. J. !

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

LORD, who may dwell in your tabernacle?
Who may dwell upon Your holy hill?

-- Psalm 15:1

We are what we do. We do what we believe.

We serve the God of our deeds. These three theses are supported by God's Word in Scripture this Lord's Day and every day of our lives. They are important to understand.

We are what we do. A lot goes into each and every act we perform. If you disagree, then try teaching someone else to walk without leaving out a single

part of that complex act. The thought behind it is more complex still, all of it originating in the *will* to walk, in the *resolve* to use feet and legs, joints and the balance of body weight to go from one place to another. Philosophers of the last century and the one before that thought that they had discovered this fact, and perhaps they had, for perhaps it had been forgotten. What we are, *who* we are is what and whom we choose to be, each moment of each day, our character building, accumulating momentum, like a great wave. To what, at the end of our finite run, will that wave amount, a life that lifts the world up, a life that tears down and destroys, or a life that never connected feelings with resolution, a life that simply vanished with no impact at all?

We do what we believe; we always do. The sin of hypocrisy is a sin not of failure but of deception, a

sin of self-delusion. In Deuteronomy, which means 'second law,' Moses calls the people to bind themselves again to God's Commandments, just as Joshua will do later at Shechem. By retelling the narrative of the Exodus to future generations, the Israelites are to continually rededicate themselves to worshipping the Creator and not the creature, to using the Divine Name to pray and bless and not to curse or for magic, to work in order to rest in God's presence and enjoy the world God has created instead of working simply to work, to respect family and the fabric of society, to respect and protect life, sexuality, marriage, the relationships of work and the tools and fruits of making a living. In this *doing* of the narrative, the story of God's liberation of His people from slavery will come alive. To own that story or, far worse, to own the story of God's liberation of all people in Jesus Christ while treating people

as though they were still in bondage to our own enslaving will is to live an unholy lie, a lie that will not be able to stand in the presence of the Holy God.

We serve the God of our deeds. As a theoretical position, it may be possible to deny the truth value of the idea of God, to assail the idea as one that cannot be proved as other ideas are proved. I agree with Luther and the ancient intuition of not only the Church but of all humanity in thinking that *every person, every single human being* and any other personal being capable of raising the question of God *has a God, believes in a God,* in an ultimate intelligent force or will. What is the evidence for this? All of our doing, our striving and our honest discourse points toward a definite direction, toward that to which we refer all desires and ultimately all questions. That Ultimate can be our appetite for power, for

possession, for gratification of base or sublime desires. Whatever that Ultimate is, that is our God. The problem is that all the Ultimates except the one, genuine Ultimate disappoint their worshippers most cruelly in life and, of course, at the hour of death, which is no time to discover that one has worshipped a mirage all one's life, nothing more than a distorted image of oneself.

'We all *have* a God,' Luther writes in almost as many words in his *Large Catechism*, 'but, what does it mean to have a *gracious* God?' We all have a core of beliefs by which we live, almost always suggested to us by other individuals, institutions, communities, or by the spirits of the times and places in which we have lived. But what would it mean to believe and to act on a gift, on an infinite kindness we had neither merited nor deserved? We all are constantly doing, constantly engaged in that

unavoidable act of becoming, but what if our doing were done with grace, and what if our becoming were to unfold in thanksgiving to others, to life and to the Giver of life all the mornings of our world until its evening and the inevitable night? It all seems to depend just on that.

+ 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 Our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.
Amen.

S. D. G. !