

"The LORD and His People in a Polytheistic World"
Exodus 34:4b-10

21 October Anno Domini 2001
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Moses broke the first stone tablets of the Ten Commandments upon the occasion of the sin of the children of Israel when they broke the First Commandment by fashioning, invoking and worshipping a golden calf as their god. The LORD God, ready to vent His holy, just wrath upon these stiff-necked people, heard the intercessory prayer of Moses and gave His Word of grace, mercy and peace. Therefore the great Jehovah passed over the former sins and called Moses to ascend the holy mountain of God even as the LORD descended from the cloud and proclaimed Himself as He passed before Moses and said, ...

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation."

Moses is in the Presence of God and he has heard the LORD's Law and God's Gospel. Overwhelmed by being in the Holy Presence of the LORD God Almighty and overcome at Yahweh's Word of peace and pardon, Moses falls to the ground and bows down before Jehovah. The sermon this morning is based on Moses' prayer placed before the LORD and the Divine reply received. Please listen to a portion of the sermon text, Exodus 34:8-10, under the theme ...

"The LORD and His People in a Polytheistic World"

"And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshiped. And he said, 'If now I have found favor in Thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray Thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thy inheritance.' And He said, 'Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with you.'"

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

An explanation is appropriate concerning the word "polytheistic." It is a word that means "many gods." Though there truly is only One God, there are many gods in this world. Thus this text bespeaks of "The LORD and His People in a Polytheistic World ... that is, in a world where there are many gods."

First, behold Moses. He is a saint. He is a sinner. He is the called man of God. Since Moses has found grace in the Presence of the LORD, he petitions God. For surely our Father in heaven hears the prayers of those who are His children. Surely He answers them according to His good and gracious will. Moses asks the LORD that He would go in the midst of His people and go wherever the congregation journeyed, that the LORD would be with them, and to do so even though those in the congregation are a stiff-necked people. The brother of Aaron and Miriam petitions God to release the people from the bondage of sin and includes himself as he prayed this: "If now I have found favor in Thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray Thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thy inheritance." Lord, forgive us our sins and keep us as Your own. Thus far the prayer of the shepherd named Moses.

Second, behold Jehovah. He is the God. He hates sin. He is the LORD of Hosts. Since He is gracious and merciful, Yahweh permits Moses to be in His Presence. He hears His prayer and He answers Moses. His answer is astounding and stunning. "He said, 'Behold, I make a covenant.'"

Listen up, the LORD makes a covenant. Though the people have rebelled against God and fashioned other gods according to their likenesses and their felt needs, the LORD will not go back on His Word. Though they have broken the Law of God, the LORD will fulfill His Law, for He has said it. The LORD gives His Word ... His Word carved in stone tablets by the finger of God ... His Word proclaimed by the mouth of a man and heard in the ears of man ... His Word of searing war etched on stoney hearts by an iron pen ... His Word of soothing peace spoken to repentance souls ... His Word become flesh and dwelling among us ... His Word hung out to dry and die on a cross for all the Law-breakers in this world when His Word atoned for each and every one of the breakings of the Law.

But consider what God promises to Moses next: "Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD." Think about the context of these words. What has happened in the recent past of the Exodus congregation? The nine plagues delivered to a nation that held the people of God in bondage. The first sign or miracle was when the LORD manifested Himself by turning water into ... blood. Thereupon followed a horde of frogs, legions of lice, swarms of flies, livestock plagued with an anthrax-like pestilence, festering boils on people, heaven's hail raining down from above, clouds of locust, and darkness so thick that it was felt. Then there was the final plague ... the death of the firstborn of the unbelievers and the deliverance of the faithful by the blood of the lamb.

Thereupon Moses led the children of Israel from the land of bondage as the LORD opened the Red Sea to permit His people to be baptized into the cloud with Moses while the infidels were immersed in the waters of eternal death. The LORD was with His people ... a pillar of fire during the night ... a column of cloud throughout the day. There was the Tabernacle where God was present with His people. There was manna from above and water from the Rock. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). They beheld the LORD ready to vent His wrath on these stiff-necked people who fashioned a golden calf as a god. They beheld Moses as he interceded on their behalf and God stayed their eternal execution. These events, and more, are what these people had witnessed and been the beneficiaries of.

Now, "after all that", listen once again to what the LORD said in reply to Moses' prayer: "Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all

the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD." Astounding! It's as if God said, "Despite the 10 Plagues, the Red Sea deliverance, the Divine wrath against sin, the gracious God Who forgives, the Presence of the LORD among His people, mankind hasn't yet seen the greatest marvels that will take place."

Perhaps you are thinking, "Well, what more could there be? How could there be anything wrought more marvelous and more terrible than all of that?" Listen to what happened next. The LORD preserved this stiff-necked people because it was through these children of Abraham that the Messiah would be come. Despite their continued faithlessness, the LORD remained faithful to His pledge to send the Eden-promised Savior. The LORD and His people journeyed through the land of the Exodus wilderness and through the days of the Judean kings. One of the marvels, such as had not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation took place in the fullness of time when the LORD, Who was with His people, came to His people in the Incarnation of the Son of God. Jesus is the God-man ... truly human, truly Divine ... begotten of God the Father from eternity ... born of the Virgin Mary in time. Jesus is Immanuel, that is, Jesus is God with us!

There's more. Listen to what happened next. Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Beautiful Savior, lived under and fulfilled His own Law perfectly, actively obeying and passively permitting Himself to be sacrificed. The sinless Savior was charged with all transgressions of His own Law. There, upon Calvary's Holy Mountain, Jesus atoned for, paid for, the sins of everyone, yours and mine included. One of the marvels, such as had not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation took place when God forsook God and Jesus suffered hell in the world's stead on the cross and then He died.

A wandering through time and space, a trek in the pursuit of the gods, will not reveal such a marvelous, terrible God as the LORD Who died in time that all might live in eternity. Behold Moloch and Moroni, both vicious gods fashioned by the hands and minds of sinful man. Behold the Muslim god demanding that followers cross the deserts of this world wielding the scimitar and executing the infidel. The disciples of Dagan, the men of Marx, the children of Chemosh, the fanatics of Freud and the sirens of Sophia confess their dogmas and chant the terrible deeds that their gods do, but there is nothing of grace, mercy and peace with them. These are terrible gods, but are not marvelous at all. The LORD is both terrible and marvelous, both awful and wonderful. His substitutionary death provides life for the world.

There's more. Listen to what happened next. Three days after Jesus' sin-atonement sacrifice of Himself he rose again from the dead. Stunning! The tomb could not hold Him. The defeat of death and devil took place just as Job knew that his Redeemer would live. One of the marvels, such as had not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation took place on the morning after Christ's Sabbath Day's rest in the tomb of death. The Resurrection! Christ is Risen! Christ is Ascended! These other gods, which are not gods, lie in the worldly dust. The Caesars have returned to the earth, the Koreschs are but ashes, and the Pharaohs are dust. The Babylonian dragon choked on a hair-ball and burst open ("Bel and the Dragon"). While Buddha the Idol sits stone-cold with its eyes shut in a petrified slumber, Jesus the Christ lives and with His eyes clear and wide open, He casts mirthful looks upon His people and beholds those with whom He is well pleased.

Is there more? Yes, there is much more. The LORD God continues to be with His people - water from the Rock - Word from the called man - Manna from above. In Baptism those men, women, children and infants who were not His people become His people, as one-by-one, "He has delivered

us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

In the Divine Service we are invited to enter into His Presence. Stiff-necked though we remain, His Word of forgiveness declared in the Absolution and proclaimed in sermons like this, is valid, effective and true, not because of the one speaking the words, but because of the One Whose Word it is. Another of the marvels, such as had not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation is the Lord's Supper where He serves Himself to His people. The bread is Jesus, God Incarnate. The wine is Jesus' Blood. He has said so, and those who doubt it, or change it, or don't believe it, do so at their own personal peril. The Lord's Supper is both marvelous and terrible; not marvelous only, but marvelous and terrible. Attendance at this Table calls for preparation and that is one reason why the Scriptures bespeak the expected practice of closed communion. To do otherwise would be unloving, unkind and unpastoral. True undershepherds of Christ want the people of the LORD to receive the intended blessing of the forgiveness of their sins.

Listen to a portion of the sermon text once more. "And He said, 'Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with you.'" "It is a terrible thing that I will do with you." What does this mean? More than we could possibly know or understand in its entirety. But here is a portion of what it means. The LORD sends His Church out into a polytheistic world with the marching orders to proclaim Christ to the nations - to tell the Good News of Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life - to call those who confess and follow other gods to repentance; that is, to show them their sin and to tell them that Jesus is the only way to eternal life. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Recall what was said near the beginning of this sermon. Though there truly is only One God, there are many gods in this world. This morning I have mentioned only a few of them. In doing so, I do not stand in this House of God and acknowledge them as gods at all, for there is only One God. For me to give any sort of credence to any one of these false gods would be a terrible sin of horrible proportions and awful consequence, both to you and to me.

Tragically this very thing has been done and is currently being supported within The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Last September 23rd, in Yankee Stadium, a District President of the LCMS took part in a service where Muslims, Sikhs, Judaists and others invoked and worshipped various gods. Prior to and following that syncretistic service the newly elected president of the LCMS has defended and supported this particular act of syncretism, as well as himself engaged in unionism. Presently, majority of the Council of Presidents and the Presidium in the LCMS are, at the least, giving the appearance of approval of these sins. The LORD says that "it is a terrible thing that I will do with you" and that certainly includes the calling of these leaders to repentance. We do so in order to announce the forgiveness of their sins to them.

Dearly beloved, one of the biggest lies staunchly maintained and propagated by those without the Church, as well as sadly by false sons within her pale, is the lie that we all worship the same god. Neither the Muslim god, nor the god of Judaism, nor the Mormon god is Christianity's God. They are unitarians of one god or another. Christianity is Trinitarian and confesses the Living God. The LORD has called His Church to take this Word of Law to the impenitent in the church as well as to the nations that they might hear the Word of the Gospel; the Good News that you hear every Sunday

and trust in every day ... that you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We pray: "If now I have found favor in Thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray Thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thy inheritance." Amen.