

"God's Echo on Earth"
Deuteronomy 6:4-9
15 June Anno Domini 2003
The Holy Trinity (Series B)
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Listen. The words are so simple that a child can understand them; the truth so profound that a doctor of theology can not comprehend it. Amazing. Mankind would have never discovered it. The truth had to be revealed to us from heaven itself, from the one living God. Stunning. If we ponder, even for a moment, the context and the content of the revelation received from the LORD our God, our souls are filled with fear, awe, wonder and gratitude. The command of Yahweh in that short chain of words accuses and crushes. The grace of the LORD Who is God, and Who reveals Who He is in a Divine verse both comforts and soothes.

A wondrous truth. Do you ask what truth? The truth has already been declared three times in this sermon. Such simple words in a short sentence. Do you ask what words?

Listen to the Word in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and hear, O Church ...

... "God's Echo on Earth"

"Hear, O Israel: 'The LORD our God, the LORD is One; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.'"

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

For there to be an echo there must first be a sound that goes forth, a word that is proclaimed. And thus, "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up" (Exodus 19:20). There the Word came to Moses and he heard it. Then, according to his call, Moses came down to the Church and the echo was heard for the first time. Moses proclaimed to the people exactly what he had been told and in doing so, it was actually God speaking through the prophet's mouth. Or, as recorded in Exodus 20 - "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me'" (v. 1-3).

No others gods! In a world of many gods the LORD declares that His Church is to have no other

gods, as the Hebrew of the First Commandment is translated ... "no other gods in My Face, in My Presence." But the natural inclination, even of those within the congregation, is to have gods and to place them in a certain pecking order: for example Jehovah first, the Golden Calf second, Baal third, the god of choice fourth. In that line of sinful reasoning, where tolerance and choice masquerade under the cloaks of love and charity, the claim of "Jesus first, Jesus first" is false doctrine.

Lest there be any doubt, listen to the echo of God's Word from the mouth of Moses: "Hear, O Israel: 'The LORD our God, the LORD is One.'" English is not capable of conveying the full depth and dimension of those words. "Hear, O Israel," that is, listen with understanding O Church: "The LORD is our God, the LORD is One - the LORD is our God, the LORD alone." "Jehovah ALONE" is our God, for only the LORD is. "Jesus ALONE" is our Savior, for only the Christ takes away the sin of the world.

He knows that He is One. We know that He is One. He knows that we know that He is One. We know that He knows that He is One.

So, why then are we to be the mouth from which God's echo on earth is heard?

There is but one reason ... commanded and privileged confession. There are three expressions of such continued confession ... personal retention, churchly instruction and earthly proclamation. I need to continue knowing that God is One. The generations in the church need to commit it to memory. The world needs to hear that "the LORD our God, the LORD is One." Consider each of these briefly.

First, Personal Retention.

"I" ... that is, "me" ... that is, "you." I personally need to hear God's echo of who He is and what He did, does and will do ... to hear the Word of truth from my own mouth. For days of temptation will come when other gods are imagined; seasons of sin and times of failure will follow when I have compromised the faith once delivered and another god is grossly invoked or subtly served. "I" ... "you" need to recall that echoed Word of God that always accuses and shows me my sin ... the Law ... the ministration of Moses. Hear, O Michael: "The LORD our God, the LORD is One; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

I personally need to hear God's echo of who He is and what He did, does and will do ... to hear the Word of truth from my own mouth and commit to memory pure doctrine. For example, the truth that God has made me and defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. Eternal life flows from the truth that Jesus, true God and true man, has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious Blood and with His innocent suffering and death. None of this is my doing. In fact, I confess that I cannot not by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the truth faith.

Therefore the confession of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is made personally, as in the Nicene Creed, "I believe in One God" and in the Athanasian Creed, "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but One God."

Lord, help us ever to retain,

The Catechism's doctrine plain,
As Luther taught the Word of Truth
In simple style to tender youth. (TLH 288, st. #1)

Second, Churchly Instruction.

Person retention leads to churchly instruction. If "I" am convinced that the truths of Law and Gospel are important to me personally, then "I" would most certainly want them to be known to and remembered by those closest to me ... my home family and my church family.

"And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Person retention leads to churchly instruction and that is evident here at Our Redeemer. Godly parents want their children to hear the Word about sin and grace. Sunday School teachers are faithful souls who prepare themselves to teach children in order that those same children will remain faithful unto death and be given the crown of life.

Pastors are called to follow in the Apostolic train and one of the reasons why they teach is in order that another man may be called to carry on when he is no longer able to preach, teach or administer the Sacraments. The Apostle Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy, "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

Congregational instruction is the discipline wherein the song of the Church is sung in the Divine Service. The historic liturgy of the Church is the sung doctrine that salvation by the grace of God through faith in Jesus the Christ. In this blessed liturgy, the Church teaches her youngest member the song of salvation so that, when and if he becomes her oldest member, he is still able to sing, even if it be only in his mind, the churchly confession of the faith.

We all believe in One true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Ever-present Help in need, Praised by all the heav'nly host,
By whose mighty pow'r alone All is made and wrought and done.

We all believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Mary's Son,
Who descended from His throne And for us salvation won;
By whose cross and death are we, Rescued from all misery.

We all confess the Holy Ghost, Who from both for-e'er proceeds;
Who upholds and comforts us In all trials, fears, and needs.
Blest and Holy Trinity, Praise for-ever be to Thee! (TLH 252)

The Church exists on the edge of eternity. The Church that will never perish is always within a generation of extinction. The Bride of Christ is sustained by God's echo on earth. Undershepherds speak the Word with the water and there is a Baptism, that is "by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). The LORD "has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit reveals and

preaches that Word, and by it He illumines and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it" (Large Catechism).

As the Church continues her exodus from the land of bondage, through the wilderness of this world and to the promised land, the congregation hears the echo of God's absolving Word. You are forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. The LORD prepares His Table before us even in the presence of our enemies. Pastors echo the Word of the Lord's Supper that was first heard when the Manna from above, at the Feast of the Passover celebrated in the upper room, said, "This is My Body, which is given for you. This is My Blood, shed for you for the remission of sin."

Third, Earthly Proclamation.

In a world where god after god after god are imagined in the minds of man, conjured by the hearts of the pagans, fashioned by the hands of idol-makers and invoked by the septic mouths of the fallen, God's echo re-sounds. "Hear, O Israel: 'The LORD our God, the LORD is One.'" In a synod where Demas after Demas after Demas has departed from the truth, denied the Word and now stand in league with the clerics of Vishnu, Allah and a legion of other false gods, God's echo goes forth, "Hear, O Church: 'The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.'"

The Earthly Proclamation of this confession is for those within the Kingdom of God and they hymn the truth ...

The Church shall never perish! Her dear Lord, to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish, Is with her to the end.
Tho' there be those that hate her, False sons within her pale,
Against both foe and traitor She ever shall prevail.

Though with a scornful wonder Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping: Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping Shall be the morn of song.
(TLH 473, st. 3-4)

The Earthly Proclamation of this confession is also for those who are outside the Kingdom of God. The Church is called to tell the world and all therein the truth. Instead of kowtowing to the agenda of the world, faithful men have stood before others to bear witness to the truth. Peter and John stood before a hostile crowd ... in the presence of the rulers and elders and scribes who "were gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family" (Acts 4:5-6).

What did these two apostles say to these false sons, traitors and their family? The truth. God's echo was heard again. "Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified, Whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man is standing before you well. This is the Stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And 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 4:10-12).

Polycarp entered the arena of the games and took his place in that infield. This church father would

not deny the LORD God by acknowledging any other god. He looked at the mob of lawless pagans in the amphitheater, shook his fist at them and said, "Away with the atheists!" To the governor who ordered him to curse Christ, Polycarp said to him, "I am a Christian. And if you would like to learn the doctrine of Christianity, set aside a day and listen." Polycarp was martyred because of his confession of Christ and rejection of other gods.

Athanasias, in a convention where he was out-numbered, stood for the truth and would not compromise by tolerating even an iota ... not even the letter "i." When Luther was called to re-cant the truth before the leaders of the land and the representatives of the anti-Christ, he would not do so.

Why were these faithful heroes of the Church so stubborn concerning the Christian faith? Because it was the difference between heaven and hell for each of them personally, and not for them only but also for the generations to come, and not for us and our children and grandchildren only, but also and even for those who hate the Body of Christ whether they be foes attacking from the outside or false sons within her pale.

You see, Jesus suffered and died for foe as well as friend, for Cain as well as Abel, for Demas as well as David, for Judas as well as Peter, for Cerinthus as well as Athanasias, for Pope Paul the Third as well as Martin the Reformer, for the traitor as well as the faithful. Christ paid the Passover price both for those who deny Christ and for those who do not know Him ... whether laity or clergy ... whether that be the Jewish rabbi or the Muslim imam or the Hindu benedictor or the pagan prophetess or the new age medium.

Just as the LORD God is neither Baal nor the Golden Calf nor the corrupted god of Judaism nor the Muslim god nor any other god, so also the true Jesus is not the Mormon Jesus nor the Muslim Jesus nor the Jehovah's Witness Jesus nor any other false christ.

Therefore, Christian love and charity does not consist in standing by and confirming the eternal destruction of your neighbor who is praying to and worshiping a god who is not the LORD God. True love does not let the Jew die without speaking of Jesus. Loving your neighbor does not mean that you remain silent so that the Arab dies in the Muslim religion without hearing the truth that Christ Jesus died and rose again for him or her. Letting charity prevail does not mean compromising the faith so that either Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, infant or aged steps into eternity without hearing the LORD God's Word of Law and Gospel.

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows His riches upon all who call upon Him. For, 'every one who calls upon the Name of the LORD will be saved.' But how are men to call upon Him in Whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of Whom they have never heard?" (Romans 10:11-14).

Thus we are the mouths that the LORD God uses to echo His Word in this world. We bear witness to the truth of Law and Gospel in order that Arab and Israeli, German and Jew, the lapsed and the false sons, might trust in their hearts and hear with their ears the Word that bring eternal life and salvation ... the Word that you hear every holy day. "You are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.