

Sermon: 14th Sunday after Pentecost – St Thomas 19th Anniversary

Text: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 (v.1)

Theme: God's blessings are in His Word

Goal: Only in God's Word (Christ Himself) we have life

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What is the most important issue to celebrate on the 19th Anniversary of St. Thomas? Is it the growing of the church? Is it the faithfulness of some of the founders? Is it the beauty of our premises? Or is it the good fellowship we enjoy?

All of them are very important and we have to cultivate them and give thanks to God for them. But our text gives the ground for these blessings I just mentioned: Faithfulness to God's Word! And, in short, we know that God's Word is Christ Himself, “the Word that became flesh and made His dwelling among us” (John 1:14). Without the faithfulness to God's Word, St. Thomas would be just a fellowship club. But we are a church, a Confessional Church, who remains and will remain faithful to God's Word, Promises and Commands till the end.

We will highlight the main verbs and some words from our text, applying this teaching to our daily lives and to the life of our beloved church St. Thomas!

I - “**Hear** now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you.”

The words 'Hear now' refer back to all that has been said so far. It sounds as if Moses was saying, 'in the light of what God has done for you, you should obey Him'. (ABC 218). God is not a despot that enslaves his people by force, giving them laws and decrees; quite the opposite: He first delivers His people from slavery and then offers them a good and safe way to walk and receive blessings. He did it with the Israelite in the Old Covenant when He saved them from the slavery in Egypt; and He did and does it with His people of the New Covenant when He saves us

from the slavery of sin to the redemption and new life in Christ. Therefore He can say now: “Hear now the decrees and laws I am about the teach you.”

Jesus quoted this warning several times as He said: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 4:9). Don't be deaf to God's Word of life!

II - “**Follow** them so that you may live. **Do not add** to what I command you and **do not subtract** from it, but **keep** the commands of the Lord your God.”

God's Commands are not just to be memorized. They are to be followed and kept. They are like a fence that protects us and our relationship, and maintains order in the world. If we pass the fence, we are not protected anymore.

Many people and churches like to add more and more laws and rules to the lives of their followers. Others consider God's Law as outdated ideas from the past, not valid for our time anymore, and they change the Law of God according to their will and desire. The warning of God is clear in our text: Follow... and keep... Follow the Commands is to follow Christ. He says that “I am the way”. When we follow Jesus by faith, the mistakes we commit in disobedience to the Law are forgiven. Of course we cannot abuse God's good will and patience, but we have to follow His paths so that we may live.

III - “**Observe** them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding.”

People are always looking for wisdom and understanding; and this is good! But some people are looking for wisdom and understanding at the wrong place, following leaders who deceive them. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10) All human wisdom and the wisdom of all sciences are good useful and helpful for matters of this life; but they will pass away. When we have to stand before God, He will not ask us

about our human knowledge and progress; but about our spiritual wisdom and understanding of His promises in Christ. Following Christ and obeying God's Commands never deceive a person. God's Commands are wise and they lead to life.

IV - “*Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live.*”

The apostle Paul warns the Christians: “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12). While in this world, we suffer all sorts of temptations. The enemy is not happy to see us following Christ. He always tries to show to God's sheep that the grass outside God's fence is greener and better than the food God provides. And as we go there to try, the enemy captures us! “Be careful and watch yourselves” is the voice of our beloved Father in heaven, like a father or a mother that says to his child: *Be careful and watch yourselves as you cross the street.* God wants us to have the best and He knows what the best is for us.

V - “*Teach them to your children and to their children after them.*”

Most of us come from Christian families. Thanks God that our parents took us to the Holy Baptism and guided us on Jesus' paths. Even if it is not your case, now you are in God's house and you are member of God's family. - What heritage will you leave for your children? What spiritual heritage will you leave for your children? God has concerns about the little ones as Jesus showed His special love for the children when “He took them in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:16).

The church is a helper to the parents in the Christian education of the children. We are preparing a Sunday School Plan for next year based on the Small Catechism. We will invite the parents to follow up the Sunday School teachings at home with their children. But the children cannot come by themselves. They need your help to come to the church

and to listen to God's word. Jesus said: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14). How can the children inherit the Kingdom of God if they haven't been introduced to it, if they don't know it? God rescues the children from sin, Satan and hell in the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism. But the children need to be nurtured in their little faith through the Word of God and through the fellowship with the Christian family.

Have you noticed a detail in this text? “**Teach** them to your children and to their children after them.” This means: to you children and to your grandchildren! I'm happy to see that some grandpas are faithfully bringing their grandchildren to the Sunday School. God bless you.

Conclusion: 19 years of blessed history have past, with ups and downs. We are celebrating God's grace and love and asking for God's blessing to the years to come. God shows us the way in Christ. He alerts us in the reading from Ephesians 6 that there are many enemies and that we have to fight with the armor and weapons that God gives us. Jesus already won the battle for us over hell, death and Satan on Easter Sunday. We have to read the text of Deuteronomy 4 in the light of this: God is showing us the way to stand firm in the new life and to get eternal life in the promised land.

To celebrate an Anniversary does not merely mean to look back and recall the history and to have good (or bad) remembrances. But it means to look forward and to make good and big plans with God's blessing. Our grandson Henrique just turned four; and he said: next year I will have a hand full! This is to look forward and work to have a good life. St. Thomas has conditions to grow more in maturity and to be a bright light to our society. If the light of faith that is in each of us shines, all together will shine brilliant! Don't be lukewarm or insecure. Be faithful and active in your faith in Jesus, and God will bless you as a person and bless us all as a church of Christ. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle

Cape Town, 02 September 2012

