

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Epiphany 6 February 13, 2011
Deuteronomy 30:15 to 20 ESV.



¹⁵"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Tomorrow is Valentine's Day! You probably know there were lots of people named Valentinus – or Valentine – who were persecuted – literally beaten, harassed, imprisoned, tortured – even put to death – for no other reason than being a Christian! There was a Valentine – who was imprisoned by Emperor Claudius II. Claudius perhaps put him in prison because he performed marriages for young Roman soldiers. The Emperor thought it best soldiers not marry – because *why*? Being married they wouldn't want to die? I don't know. They say Claudius tried to persuade Valentine – to believe in the gods of Roman mythology – so he wouldn't lose his life. Valentine tried to tell Claudius about Jesus – so he wouldn't lose his soul. Tradition says the night before he was to be put to death for loving Jesus – Valentine wrote a note to a young lady – perhaps the blind daughter of the jailer – the blind young lady that Valentine worked a miracle – healing her eyes. That night Valentine wrote her a letter – a love letter that he signed – *your Valentine!* Tomorrow people will give and receive a zillion little heart shaped cards. There will be countless boxes of chocolates bought – and dozens of long stem roses received. People will go out to eat – and there will be endless talk about love. The sad thing is – so much of that talk will be only about "hugs and kisses" kind of love. While God's Word talks about the sweetest kind of love – love that gives and forgives for Jesus' sake. Today in the light of Moses' final speech to the people of Israel we will say:

Thank the LORD for Family

- 1. The LORD sets before us life and death***
- 2. The LORD sets before us prosperity and destruction.***

It's always important to appreciate the context. 2,000 years before the Christ-child was born – by grace alone – pure and sweet amazing grace – God chose Abraham to be the heir of a wondrous promise. Remember how God called Abraham to climb out of his tent in the night – to count the stars – if he could. Like the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the sea shore – that's how your family will be! Some 600 years later – the children of Abraham had become a

great nation – maybe as many as a million people? Down in Egypt – the children of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob had lived in the very best part of Egypt – the land of Goshen. That’s where Joseph sent his brothers and all their families to live – to ride out the 7 years of famine that followed the 7 years of plenty. Joseph’s brothers had intended to sell him into slavery – to get their jealous revenge – but the LORD intended it for good – to accomplish the rescue of lots and lots of people! As the years began to pass--eventually the people began to forget Joseph – and all he had done to accomplish God’s rescue plan. Instead of gratitude – the Egyptian hearts were filled with a racist paranoia! If Egypt was attacked – and these foreigners in our midst should join our enemies – we would be sunk! And so they began to persecute the Israelis in their midst! In the end – it wasn’t enough to be prejudice and persecute them – they literally enslaved them – making them make mud bricks to build for the mighty Pharaoh. The LORD heard the cries of his people – when their slavery became so painful they couldn’t bear it! Now – according to the LORD’s flawless timing – He sent Moses to tell the self-important Pharaoh – **“This is what the LORD says, ‘Let my people go!’”** When Pharaoh showed his obstinate heart again and again – the patience of the LORD ran out. Then the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart – and the tenth plague – the death of the 1st born – meant screams of sadness in all the homes of the Egyptians. After celebrating the Passover for the 1st time – out into the night went the children of Israel – *“Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty--free at last!”* Through the Red Sea on dry land went the children of Israel. The army of the Pharaoh drowned. God’s people – maybe a million marched out into the wilderness – where they quickly forgot their Father’s love and complained bitterly. They came to Mt. Sinai and while Moses received the LAW – they sat down to eat and drink – and rose up to indulge in pagan revelry around the golden calf. Up to the Promised Land they came – and melted with fear. They doubted that the LORD could deliver this land already inhabited by giants into their hands. So they wandered for 40 years – around and around in circles they went – till those who had doubted were dead – their bones buried in the wilderness. Now it was time to inherit the land--the Promised Land – the land the LORD had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Before they went in – Moses addressed them one more time. Moses gave them law and gospel – words of warning and words of promise and encouragement!

Moses said: ¹⁵**See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.** ¹⁶**If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.** It is as simple as life and good, death and evil. Why would you ever choose evil? I was eating my breakfast oatmeal – watching the news – when they showed the snow storm in New York. A man with a security camera aimed at his front porch – recorded his neighbor from across the street – up on his porch – stealing his snow shovel! What did he do? He took his snow blower – and blew all the snow from his sidewalk all over his neighbor’s car. He buried it in snow! Back and forth he went – carefully blowing all the snow onto her car! Then he watched as it took her 4 hours – to dig out her car! Then the news lady said, “Good! I’m glad! I’m glad he blew all that snow and buried her car! That’s what we all want to do. We just don’t have the courage – to get even with our neighbor like that!” Really? I heard again the other day – “Turn the other cheek? That just gets you punched on that side of your face, too!” I have been told more than once – God’s Word sounds great on paper. It just doesn’t work in the real world! Really? If Scripture is only right and true in this building. If God’s Word only has power in a building with stained glass windows – then our God is a pretty puny God! The Good Friday and Easter Gospel have

everything to do with every day – Friday night fish and Sunday afternoon football and Monday morning back to school and work and doing laundry and unloading the dishwasher. God’s Word has to do with paying your bills – and phone calls in the middle of the night – that someone we love has died. God’s Word is about every moment here – and forever in Heaven!

¹⁵See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. There are 10 commandments – not many – just ten. When you are in 8th Grade – you know the Ten Commandments – don’t you? *You shall have no other gods. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God. Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you. That you may enjoy long life on the earth. Are you with me? You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his man servant or his maid servant or his cattle or anything that belongs to your neighbor.* That’s it – the 10 Commandments! To memorize the Ten Commandments – and even the *What does this mean?* – part isn’t very hard. It’s *keeping* the commandments that’s hard. The first three commandments about loving the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and all your mind. That’s hard! And then to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself – that’s hard, too! In fact – apart from Jesus’ forgiving love – it’s *impossible*. It’s impossible to serve God – unless our heart is filled with the Holy Spirit. It’s only when the Holy Spirit empowers us that we can bear the fruits of faith that God planned all along for us to bear. It’s only when the Holy Spirit empowers us that we can bear the fruits of faith Paul talks about in Ephesians. The **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** that give glory to God. Jesus said – when people see the good deeds we do because He fills our life – they will give glory to our Father in Heaven!

Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." Your offspring – your children and grandchildren – God’s Word says we need to be concerned about them! It’s depressing to open a home page on the Internet and read that an actress so pretty they talk about her playing Lois Lane in the next Superman movie and her husband of 8 years – a real live Italian prince – will not live happily ever after! That’s what everyone wants to do – to *live happily ever after!* What goes so horribly painfully wrong? It’s not a matter of being beautiful enough or handsome enough on the outside! These people are paid literally millions of dollars for their outward beauty. It can’t be they have arguments about money – because – again – they literally have millions and millions of dollars! They have literally mansions and castles! They build pole barns to hold their collections of antique cars! They have suits and dresses that cost thousands of dollars each. They have all the “things and stuff” that this world has to offer – even fame and popularity! What could be missing? A day to day appreciation for Jesus’ forgiving love! What spouses need – what children need from their parents is forgiving love! They need a love that listens – with the ears and with the heart! Children don’t need dads that can buy them lots and lots of violent video games and expensive phones so they have unlimited texting – and a swoosh on their sneakers and a high def TV for their own room. Children need to see their father love their mother **like Christ loved the church**. They need to see their parents reading their Bibles and coming to Church again and

again. They need to see their parents discussing family finances in the light of Jesus' powerful promise that he will give us our daily bread. In the light of Jesus' powerful promise that he feeds the sparrows and dresses—the wild flowers. Jesus will not fail us during the most difficult financial circumstances. Children need to see their parents—not abusing drugs or alcohol or tobacco. They need to see their parents loving and forgiving each other—and loving and forgiving their children. They need to see their parents showing them God's plan for husband and wife and family—houses—made into homes warm and lit by Jesus' unconditional love!

Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." Back in the day—the name J. Paul Getty was the name for great earthly wealth—for having more money than you could ever spend! Balthazar Getty—son of J. Paul Getty III announced that his father has passed away—almost 5 years younger than I am. You might think—having a grandpa who had literally billions of dollars—billions—with a B—so many dollars—he was thought to be the richest man in the whole wide world when he died back in 1976. You would think—if that was your grandpa you would live a charmed life! You would be painfully wrong! J. Paul III was expelled from 7 schools. When he was only 16 years old—J. Paul III was kidnapped! Grandpa didn't want to pay the ransom! He said—I have 14 grandchildren. If I pay a penny of ransom—soon all my grandchildren will be snatched! When the kidnappers sent the family one of J. Paul's ears—they paid some \$3 million—loaned by Grandpa and repaid at 4% interest. Imagine being chained to a stake for 5 months! We were more helpless than that! We were dead in our trespasses and sins. Our Heavenly Father sacrificed his one and only Son Jesus—to buy us back. Jesus paid our ransom—not to the devil—but to His Heavenly Father. Jesus paid for all our sins. He redeemed us—bought us back! Gives us the forgiveness of every sin. In light of forgiving love like that—let us choose life not death. Let us choose prosperity—not destruction. Let us live family lives dedicated to glorifying the great I AM—until we are safe in the Promised Land of Heaven for Jesus' sake. Amen!

To God alone all glory!
Rev. Anthony E. Schultz

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¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses

against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Psalm

EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 2:6-13

⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" – the things God has prepared for those who love him – ¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

GOSPEL: Matthew 5:21-37

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. ²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ "Settle matters quickly with your

adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. ²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. ³¹ “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. ³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ ³⁴ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.