

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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March 19, 2006
3rd Sunday in Lent
Psalm 19
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 20:1-17
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 19
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:22-25
Gospel: John 2:13-22

God's Word is More Precious than Gold

What is more precious than gold? I suppose more precious than money to us at times are the things that we buy with our money. That is why we give our money away, because we want to buy something because it is more precious to us than just having that pile of money. Or maybe it is what our money can do for us. But there are certain things I think we would think are not really worth more to us than money or possessions. What would you give for a cold glass of water? What would you give for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich? How much gold are you going to give away for that stuff? Not a whole lot, right?

I suppose it depends, doesn't it? To a man in the desert that is dying of thirst, that glass of water becomes a little more precious than gold, doesn't it? To someone who is starving to death, that peanut butter and jelly sandwich starts to look pretty good, doesn't it? It is a little bit better than all the piles of gold that you can put in front of that person. Sometimes it takes us seeing what our true needs are to recognize what truly is precious.

Today's Psalm of the Day, Psalm 19, tells us that God's Word, his Law (his teachings is really what the Hebrew is saying), is *more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb*. That certainly is true and it becomes all the more true to us when we see just how desperate we are for it and how much we need it. As we see that, we see that it is so precious to us because it teaches us things that nature itself can't and then the affect it has on us is really amazing. This powerful Word changes our life.

Psalm 19 is a Psalm of David. David writes it and he really expresses some great truths that the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. One of the truths he tells us about is that the world around us tells us something about God. Day after day the world around us is talking to us. He is not just talking about birds singing. Day after day *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard*. The world around us tells us something about God. So the question becomes, what does it tell us about God?

I have visited people that don't get to church all that often and I've heard this said to me, "I can be just as close to God out fishing as you are there in your church." Psalm 19 would seem to indicate that there is some truth to that, right? Out in the fishing boat, God is pouring forth knowledge as you see the sky and the seas and everything else,

but what do you exactly see? You see that God is wise in the way he created everything. You look at how the world around us works and you see God's wisdom. When I get cut, I heal. That tells me something about the fact that God is smart. He didn't put my eyes on my elbows. God is a pretty intelligent guy.

He is pretty powerful because the seas, the mountains and everything else that you might be able to see when you are out in nature, they are all under his thumb. He brought them all to be by simply saying, "Let there be", and there was.

That is pretty important to know about God. He is wise and he is powerful. The other thing that nature can tell us is that part of nature that is inside every one of us, right? We call it our conscience. When God tells us, "I don't like sin", our conscience brings up that thing that we all try to run away from. What is that called?—guilt. I don't want to deal with my guilt so I am going to blame my upbringing. I am going to blame other things because I don't want to admit that I have sinned as my conscience at times screams at me.

Okay, so now I am holding that fishing pole. I look around and see that God is wise and I see that God is powerful and my conscience tells me, "You are a sinner." All of a sudden it isn't the fish at the end of the line that is making the fishing pole shake, is it? Nature tells me that I have a God who is wise and powerful and he doesn't like it when I sin and my conscience tells me I sin. So you know what? I will just start rewriting my conscience. I will tell it to shut up so it doesn't bother me anymore. That is where God comes in and he gives us something that will supplement the knowledge that we get from nature. He gives us his teachings, his Word. The Law of the Lord, you could really put in here the Word of the Lord and in some places even the Gospel.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. Where I have convinced my conscience that what I have done is not a sin, that when I hate this other person that is in my life that is a jerk to me and he deserves it, my conscience tells me that God's Word comes along and says to me, "Love your enemies. Bless those who hate you. Bless those who curse you." And God's Word shows me that anyone who hates his brother is a murderer because he has murdered in his heart. God's Word makes the simple mind that I am (because it can excuse all of my sins) wise because it shows me exactly what God says is right or wrong.

This at times also terrifies me because day after day I am reminded that I sin. Those commands of the Lord that are radiant, that give light to the eyes, shine light on the dark recesses of my heart that don't love perfectly, that don't always want to help or be the best friend that I can be. The dark recesses of my heart that at times are filled with a black bitterness—we each have that because we each have that sinful nature. God's Word reveals that to us where our conscience might want to just excuse some of it.

But then it is said that God's Word does something else. It says that the Law of the Lord revives the soul. The Law of the Lord brings us joy. It gives joy to the heart. God's Law can't do that to me. When you heard those Ten Commandments being read this morning, did it bring joy to your heart because you said to yourself, "I do that all the

time, every moment of every day. Boy, God is lucky he has me.” Or did it show you that you don’t love perfectly and you don’t do what God has called you to do. The Law doesn’t give joy. The Law doesn’t revive us. What revives us is what we heard in our Second Lesson—*we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* In God’s Word I see that I have a Savior who loved perfectly in my place and who did everything that God requires of me. He did it for me. When God gives me the gift of faith, the Gospel tells me that when God looks at me, he sees that perfection he demands of me. That is what brings joy to my heart—that what God demands of me, God gives to me.

Wouldn’t it make April 15th a little more enjoyable if what the government demanded of you it gave to you so that you could give it right back to them? That would be ridiculous, wouldn’t it? But isn’t that exactly what God has done for you and me? What he demands of us—perfection—he gives to us in Christ. The punishment he says that our sins deserve, he poured out on Christ. That lifts us up. That brings joy to our hearts. That takes away the sadness and the excuse making. It takes away the bitterness and the envy and the jealousy and all of those things and it replaces it with a childlike joy—a child that rejoices to know that it is loved has a smile on its face constantly.

You and I, as Christians who are loved by God, when we see how desperately we need that love (that we are that starving man and that we are that person dying of thirst—spiritual thirst and spiritual hunger), then we see that God has served it up to us on a banquet that never ends, a feast and a buffet that we can constantly eat and drink from—the feast of his love and his forgiveness. He gives it to us in his Word. He gives it to us in baptism. He gives it to us in the Lord’s Supper. He says, “You are my own. I have loved you perfectly and absolutely.” That is why they are sweeter than honey. That is why they are more precious than gold because it gives to us what gold can never buy. It gives to us a right relationship with God.

Nature can tell us a lot of things, but it will never tell us who are Savior is. That is what makes God’s Word so precious. It points to him clearly and continually. It points to our Triune God.

Then, as you and I are pointed to that, it changes us. It changes our lives. One of the ways it changes us is it makes us want to do what is pleasing to God. The part in us that loves Jesus, that loves God, that hears those Commandments that God gave in Exodus 20, no longer feels like someone is heaping a burden on our shoulders as—“This is impossible. I can’t do this. This isn’t fair.” Instead of hearing that, the new self hears those Words and says, “Great! There is another way I can show my love and my thanks to God! And there’s another way I can love him! And there’s another way I can love him! There’s another way I can let my light shine! Yes, I am going to screw up. Yes, I am going to sin. But I know when I say, ‘Lord, forgive my sins. Forgive even my hidden faults—the ones I don’t even know I have committed that hurt someone else without me even knowing it.’” Then I know my God takes it away. So I say to God, “Lord, help me so that every thought I have, the meditation of my heart, and every word that I speak that comes out of my mouth, help me Lord so it is pleasing to you because I want to please you. I don’t have to please you. I want to live for you.” That is how

God's Word that is more precious than gold changes us. We don't look at God's commands as this huge burden that makes life un-fun and unfair and a heavy burden and shuffle along as though our God is beating us down. Because God has taken away our sins in Christ, we look at these commands as something that are a way we can show our love for God so that sin won't rule over us. Instead, we can strengthen that new self in us so that day by day we get stronger and we have more desire to serve our God and find more joy in serving Christ. Because in serving Christ—recognizing who he is and what he has done for us—there is great joy.

Your sinful nature doesn't believe it. Your sinful nature doesn't want you to believe it. But the part of you that loves Jesus because he died for you knows that it is true. God's Spirit has revealed it to the deepest part of your soul. God's Spirit is the one that will help you live it as you spend more and more time in the Word and in the Sacraments.