



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

July 9, 2023

Pastor Randy Ott

6th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Exodus 32:15-29](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 89 CW

Second Lesson: [1 John 2:15-17](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 10:34-42](#)

The Christian Loves God above All Things Do You Love and Serve the Seen or the Unseen?

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus:
Amen.

In Christ, our Risen and Ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

One of the greatest tragedies of my ministry took place almost 33½ years ago. It came about because I was focused on the seen and not the unseen. I was going to go visit the Wiebusches and I got so busy and so focused on all the different things I was running around to do, I completely forgot about it. I didn't get there. So I'm in church two days later and they said, "Where were you pastor? We missed you." Then it dawned on me that I had missed the appointment. They said "Sorry, we ate the coconut cream pie," and I never got to have it.

Not really a great tragedy, right? It saddened me, but I went and visited the next week and we got to know each other. Mike actually took care of a lot of our kids while they were growing up. He would sit in the back. He was one of the Elders and he helped Paula with the kids all the time.

But today in what I read to you from [Exodus 32](#), there was a real tragedy; 3,000 people died. Why? Part of it is because they were focused on loving and serving what they could see instead of loving and serving the unseen. When Moses disappeared from their sight, they forgot about the unseen God who Moses served and wanted something they could see. It caused all kinds of problems for them. The question we have to ask ourselves today is, are we at times like the Israelites there at the foot of Mount Sinai?

I'll grant you that the Israelites saw some pretty incredible things. This is right after they had come out of Egypt, after the Ten Plagues. That had to be something to see. Go back and read about the [plagues in Egypt](#). All the water in the land and the wells in the Nile all turning to blood—that had to be something that stuck with you. Frogs everywhere—I have no desire to see frogs everything but I think if I saw it, it would stick with me and haunt my dreams at times. Think of the sounds that they heard! As the Angel of Death came through all of Egypt and killed the first born of all the people and all the livestock, the cries of the dying, the cries of the mourning. And they were protected by the blood of the Passover Lamb over the doorposts. Those were incredible sights and sounds. They saw incredible things. Then they left the next day and the Egyptians say “Hey, here’s our gold. Here’s our silver. Get out of town! We don’t you here anymore! Go worship your Lord.”

Then they get to the Red Sea, and what do they see? The cloud was getting closer and closer and closer, and that cloud was the most powerful army of the day coming because Pharaoh had changed his mind and wanted his slaves back. Think of the fear in their hearts. And then they see Moses with his arms up and the waters parted. There was a wall of water on each side and they go across on dry ground. They get to the other side and see the arms come down and they see the waters crash down on that most impressive army of the day, and they are delivered. That’s what they had just seen.

Then they come to Mount Sinai. They had seen at the foot of Mount Sinai the descending cloud and the thunder and the presence of God. Moses had (in a couple chapters earlier) given them God’s Laws—the Covenant agreement between the people. The people said “We are going to do that.” Then 70 of the elders of the people, including Moses and Aaron, went up on the mountain and ate in the presence of God. It’s described as things that you can’t put into words. The people had watched about 38-39 days earlier Moses walk up the mountain, the cloud descend on it, and then he was gone. Within 38 days, they come to Aaron and say “Hey Aaron, we don’t know where this Moses guy is anymore. He has been gone for 38 days.” That’s a long time. Your milk would spoil in the fridge in that amount of time. “Make us a god. We don’t know where this Moses is that led us out of Egypt. He’s gone! He’s forgotten! I can’t see him! Give me something I can see! What I remember seeing is the bull god in Egypt that was the god of fertility, so let’s make that and then we’ll have a party.” Aaron says “Okay, we’ll do that. Give me your gold and we’ll make this calf and we’ll say it’s a festival to the Lord.” “It’s to the Lord” even though God, in that Covenant that they had gotten not even 40 days earlier had said, “Don’t make any idols. That’s not how I want to be worshipped.” They said “We can’t see you now, so we’re going to build an idol.” Forty days!!

Moses is on the mountain. God comes to Moses and says (you should [read this](#). It’s in the chapters right before what I read to you earlier) “Hey, those people, your people that you brought out of Egypt, they’ve already torn apart and ripped up and threw out

the Covenant and they made themselves a golden calf, an idol, to worship. You go down and I'll destroy them and I'll make you another people to lead." Then Moses pleads with God and says, "Don't do that. That's not who you are. You are faithful to your promises." The first thing he says is, "You can't do that because that's not who you are." The second thing he says is "If you do that, all the Egyptians are going to say 'Their God just brought them out into the wilderness to destroy them.'" The third thing he said is, "All these other nations around us where we are now, they are going to see what you did and they aren't going to want to hear about you. Your glory will be hidden to them. You can't do that. They are YOUR people. They are not my people. They are YOUR people." So God relents. Moses comes down the mountain and now this is where what I read to you starts.

Evidently Joshua meets him on the mountain and says "Hey, it sounds like there is war in the camp!" It's not war. It's the sound of singing. It's the sound of a party. This Egyptian god was the god of sex, so it was obviously not a God-pleasing party with this dancing and this revelry that was going on. So Moses comes down and a lot of things happen now that I don't really get. I can't tell you why. Why does Moses burn the calf and make them drink it? I don't know. God didn't tell me. Why did the Lord tell Moses to have whoever was on the side of the Lord come to him and strap a sword to their side? I don't know. I can't tell you. God didn't tell me. But God looks at things differently than we do.

God looks beyond our flimsy excuses for our actions. Did you hear Aaron's excuse? Doesn't Aaron sound like one of the kids with Cheetos dust all over their fingers saying "I didn't eat the Cheetos. I just threw the gold in and a calf came out. It wasn't my fault. This is what the fire did." Blame the fire. How dumb do you think someone else is when they say some of these things? But we do that, don't we? God looks beyond all those excuses. God looks beyond all this stuff. God is looking at a picture that is so different than what you and I are.

We are stuck often only looking at what we can see, but you have to understand that God can see all of eternity in an instant. He is looking at a much bigger picture than we are, and for whatever reason that God said "Moses, have them come to you and whoever comes to you, have them take a sword and kill the people—your brother, your friend, your neighbor," it was really an incredible application of what Jesus said in our Gospel. "Whoever loves son or daughter, mother or father, more than me is not worthy of me." Have you ever thought about this? If you are one of the Israelites there at Mount Sinai, would you be at the party, or would you be sharpening your sword?

I am really thankful God hasn't told me to go kill people in His name. I don't know if I could do it. I don't know if that is something I would want to do. I have a feeling my sinful nature would have wanted to be at the party. How about you?

I think, just like the Israelites, we often—they were troubled because they couldn't see Moses anymore. "I need something I can see. I need a golden calf. I need to see us doing this or that. I don't just need the unseen God telling me what to do. I need something more." I think we're often the same way. We can belittle them and say how terrible they are, but think about it. How often do you and I focus on what we can see instead of on the unseen God?

I think about all the time when I was in grade school and high school. You grade school kids—did you ever do something stupid at school that you knew you weren't supposed to, ever once, maybe, maybe a little? I can think back to some of the times when I did some of that stuff in grade school or high school. Why did I do it? Did I know it was wrong? Yes. Why did I do it? I did it because I could see my group of friends who were saying "Hey, Randy, this will be fun. Let's do this!" I was more worried about what my friends would think of me than what God thought of me. I was more focused on the seen than the unseen. And it's not just when we're kids.

"Anyone who loves anyone else more than me is not worthy of me," Jesus said. It's pretty easy to love the seen more than we love God at times, especially in those family relationships that Jesus talked about. It's hard when someone you love dearly is caught in a sin to tell them it's a sin, because all you can see is that might cost you that relationship. That might cost you that relationship with a family member or a friend or whoever it might be. *I can see that and I can feel their sting, and if I don't do what God says, it's not like lightning comes and strikes me down right now, so I'm not so worried about it.*

God hasn't asked you and me to strap a sword to our sides. He has asked us though to love others by loving Him more, by doing things for our family because we love Him; not just because we love our family. It's great to do all kinds of things for our family, but honestly, do we ever cross over into loving family more than we love God? We can chase around with family when kids are little and all kinds of things because that's a priority and sometimes God isn't so much a priority. Or we can approach it this way. "That's the expert's job. We'll have the Sunday school teachers, the grade school teachers or vacation Bible school teachers tell them about God so that we don't have to."

God has called us to love our family by what we sang in the Psalm today. "I will sing of the LORD'S great love forever; I will make your faithfulness known through all generations." We said that was what we are going to do. That "I'm going to do it" NOT "I'm going to hire it out."

I have a picture in my office in the basement on the lateral file of Helen Scoles. She was a kindergarten teacher and 4th-8th grade teacher half time. I love her to pieces. She was my favorite teacher I ever had. I would stop and see her when I would get back to

Michigan, even after I was a pastor. I just loved talking to her. I don't quote her. I quote my mom and dad. I spent more time with mom and dad. I was blessed with a mom and dad that took talking about Jesus seriously. They sent me to all these things so I could be educated about Christ, but they also talked to me about it because they knew that's what God had asked them to do. The best love they could show to me was to live their faith and talk about their faith with me. That's the best love they could give to their child. If they wouldn't have done it, I probably wouldn't be here today standing in front of you, putting some of you to sleep. That wouldn't be an option. I'd be somewhere else in the world.

Love others but love the unseen more and let your love for these other people be according to His will and in a way that glorifies Him, but why? Why? If you and I are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that you and I have screwed this up over and over and over. We have loved the seen things around us and we pushed God to the back and said "Hey God, I'm a Heisman statue and you're at the end of my stiff arm." This is what we do. We're sinners. We could sit here the rest of the day and try to come up with every time we've done it and we wouldn't even get close to listing a third of it. But your God knows every last time you've done it! He knows it, of every last person in the world, every time they have loved something more than they love Him, those who claim to love Him and be His people, He knows every one of our failings!

And He still loves us. And He still forgives us. And He still is desperate for us to know that in the waters of Baptism, He clothed us with Jesus' righteousness because we aren't going to be perfect. And He gives us the Word so that we can hear over and over and over, not just in worship but daily, how desperately He loves us. He gives us His very body and blood, given and poured out on the cross, to say "You are my forgiven child."

I didn't see the Red Sea part. You didn't see the Red Sea part. But you saw the heaven part. You saw Jesus come to earth in Bethlehem. You saw the empty tomb as He left it. You've seen that through the eyes of faith, and that gift that the Holy Spirit has given you leads you to want to get better at loving and serving the unseen, because He loved you first. He loved you perfectly. And He loves you eternally. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.