



**Deuteronomy 11:1-7, 16-21 Our Great Heritage 6 Pastor Ron Koehler
Grace-Tucson, AZ July 23, 2017**

Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always. ² Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; ³ the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; ⁴ what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the LORD brought lasting ruin on them. ⁵ It was not your children who saw what he did for you in the desert until you arrived at this place, ⁶ and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the earth opened its mouth right in the middle of all Israel and swallowed them up with their households, their tents and every living thing that belonged to them. ⁷ But it was your own eyes that saw all these great things the LORD has done.

¹⁶ Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.

¹⁷ Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving

you. ¹⁸ Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

¹⁹ Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, ²¹ so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of the things you may know about Martin Luther is that he wrote...a lot! A shelf in my office holds 54 books, each about an inch and a half thick, containing Luther's writings. One of them contains Luther's letter titled TO THE COUNCILMEN OF ALL CITIES IN GERMANY THAT THEY ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS. That's a long title for a long letter! It's the length of 4 or 5 sermons—over 10,000 words!

In this letter, Luther pushed the local governments to establish and maintain a school system because schools that had been run by the church had fallen apart. The abuses of the church and the false teachings that were finally out in the open caused the people to not trust the church-run schools and they were not inclined to have their children there. Going without education was seen as a viable option; life skills would be learned elsewhere. Luther said, *"Not good enough!"*

Luther pushed for a public educational system that made school mandatory for all children (not just the wealthy) and was broad and rich in its content. He proposed that children should be treated with kindness and love in the classroom instead of instilling fear in them. Oh, he also wanted girls to be included in the schools, which was revolutionary in Europe—and it happened! His ideas, including courses of study, textbooks, teaching methods, principles, method of discipline, and school regulations were way ahead of their time. Luther was able to accomplish a great deal in the area of education of the German people during his lifetime. His model set the standard for modern education to the extent that he is among the greatest educators the world has known. And you thought he just wrote a nice little teaching book called, *"The Catechism!"* You may not have known that many consider Luther the father of modern education!

He also became Europe's most published author within five years of his posting of the 95 Theses. And one of his best-selling works was entitled, *"A Sermon on Keeping Children in School."*

Inherent in the educational system Luther prompted in medieval Germany was the teaching of God's Word. To Luther, education included *Christian* Education. This is very different than the separation that exists between public and Christian education we have in our country today. While the model of public education we use has its roots in Luther's model, instruction in God's Word has been removed from our system. And I suppose we could debate the wisdom of that. BUT, we cannot debate the need for Christian Education, the need to instruct the young—and the old—in the Scriptures and in the things of God. This is not up for debate because God is the one who commands

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Very often today, when we say "Christian Education," we think of a Christian school, like Redeemer Lutheran Elementary School or Arizona Lutheran Academy, our high school in Phoenix. But when God talks about godly instruction or Christian Education, he is talking more broadly. There are things he would have all of his people know and remember. This requires teaching.

This has always been the case, as our lesson from Deuteronomy chapter 11 makes clear. These are words the LORD had Moses speak and record for God's people. There were many laws and commands from God, things he wanted his people to do, a way that he wanted them to live. What he really wanted was for his people to live this way out of love for him.

And why would they love the LORD? Because they had experienced God's love in so many ways! They were the ideal people to educate others because they had lived under the blessing of God. Just think of what they could share with others and teach their children! They had witnessed the plagues God sent upon Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea as he led his people out of captivity, the cloud and the pillar of fire that led them through the wilderness and the manna and quail he provided for his people. They could recall how the Lord opened up the earth to have it swallow the men who rebelled against Moses and Aaron, whom the Lord had called to lead his people. Can you imagine what story time must have been like for these people? Can you imagine wide-eyed children hearing about how powerful God was and how he loved and cared for his people?!

But this was not just the stuff of bedtime stories. No, God wanted these things to always be in the forefront of their minds. He commanded them to teach these things always with what you and I might call "God talk"—everyday kinds of things that prompt conversations about God. This is how God expressed his desire for his people to daily remember him and educate those around them: **Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.** Sitting, walking around, morning and night—in other words, always! God's people were *always* to be mindful of his power and love, his protective care and his promises.

Did you notice what God said the result of their instruction to one another would be? They would be blessed in the land that the Lord was giving to them. Their lives would be blessed.

When God told them to keep his *requirements*, he used a word that means “something held in trust” or an obligation. And he said they should realize that the children didn’t know what *they* knew about God. So God was entrusting things to them that they were to share with those who didn’t know so that they too could marvel at the almighty God and his love and respond with a life that was pleasing to the LORD.

This is an expectation that has not gone away. You and I are in quite a similar position as those Israelites of long ago! You know God and his will. You know his power shown in your life, like the saving power of baptism and how he has always provided for you. You know of God’s love because you’ve experienced it! God in love gave you faith, gave you forgiveness, gave you the promise to work all things for your good and to bring you to heaven one day! You have experienced this! You know it!

And so God says to you: talk about it! The normal course of a day presents opportunities for “God-talk” with those around you.

- A beautiful sunset over the cactus and mountains is an opportunity to talk about God’s creative hand.
- An unexpected bonus at work or a financial windfall is a chance to praise God for his continued care.
- A baptism at church or a confirmation is a chance to tell how God did those things for you and to rejoice in God’s love for someone else.
- Food on the table—several times a day—leads to expressions of thanks.
- Challenges or tragedies in your life provide occasions to talk about God’s promise to be with you always.
- Bad news on TV moves us to recall that God governs the nations and his mighty hand extends over all things.
- Our personal sins cause us to seek and to speak of Jesus’ forgiveness.
- All the blessings of church life prompt us to tell others about the good things God is doing at Grace and to invite them to know God here.

Life is full of so many teachable moments for ourselves, our spouses, our children, our friends!

While thinking of all the opportunities to remember and speak and teach is wonderful, it might very well be that our consciences have been aggravated because while our everyday lives are filled with these chances to do what God commands, we realize how often we *don’t* do this! It is not only sin to do things God says are wrong, it is also sin to *leave out* things he wants us to do! We have not been great moms and dads and grandparents and spouses and friends. And we have not been acting as children of God. Think about what it means that we offend God at every missed opportunity!

God has every right to have the waters crash over us in judgment like he did to Pharaoh's armies or have the ground open and swallow us. Hell is where we ought to be sent for ignoring God and caring so little for our faith and the faith of those around us.

Today we humbly bow in repentance before God for these and all our sins. And we appeal to Jesus for forgiveness because he is the only one who perfectly remembered his heavenly Father's will and perfectly carried it out. He never missed an opportunity to share God's expectations and blessings and promises with others. He was the perfect teacher to all around him. This is why his blood, shed on the cross, purifies us of these sins and all others. This is why we look to him. And this is why he looks back at us and tells us, *"You are forgiven."*

As we hear those words, *"You are forgiven,"* we are changed. Our consciences are set free. We are thankful. And we have the desire to go and sin no more. We want to make use of the opportunities available to us so that we remember what God says, so that we are moved to share these things with others.

And look at what God gives you so that you can do what he's asking of you today. You get to go to Bible study. You get to read your Bibles. You get to go to Sunday School or Confirmation Class where Luther's Catechism is still used today. You get to go to Redeemer for school, or ALA. You get those everyday chances to think of God and speak of him. You get to encourage others in their faith like the Israelites of old. You can do it in person, on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram, in an email or a text. You can do it in the morning or at night, on a hike or just hanging out. So many opportunities!

God promised a certain result if his people long ago would do this remembering and educating. He guaranteed a blessed life in the promised Land that he was leading them to. God holds out some promises for you and me as well. As we make use of God's Word, he promises to strengthen our faith. He tells us that we will know him better and know how to live for him. He assures us we'll know how to handle life's challenges. He promises comfort for our souls. AND he guarantees a promised land for us—heaven.

Our God is the amazing and only God. He always has been, he is now, and he always will be. May this command to his people long ago be a reminder for us as well to be educated about him and to educate others. We have even more to tell than the Israelites did because Jesus has come as our Savior with forgiveness and salvation. We have the gifts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Blessing after blessing have come to us from the powerful and loving LORD. We have a lot to be thankful for and a lot to share. May the Holy Spirit work in us as we look to make the most of every Christian Education opportunity—both for our souls and for the spiritual good of those around us. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.