

There Is No Ambiguity in Faith
Sermon for Reformation Day
Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-9



“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Maria was so excited. Finally, she could realize her dream! She had been saving her pocket money for months. Now, her piggybank could finance what her heart desired: a used smartphone. Her joy and excitement were even greater when she actually discovered a real iPhone on eBay. For days she sat in front of the computer, excitedly typing and bidding. Only a few minutes before the auction ended, there was a single bid left and the auction price was just bit less than what she had in her piggybank. And lo and behold! Maria won the auction and was now the proud owner of an iPhone. Maria could hardly sit still with impatience and anticipation as she waited for the mailman. Finally, the time had come. With a cry of joy, she greeted the mailman. But shortly afterwards, her joy was overshadowed by disappointment and sadness, because the package didn't contain a smartphone at all, but just a protective cover for a phone. Maria was inconsolable. She became one of millions of people who had fallen victim to an eBay scammer. In our lives as humans, we encounter such disappointments again and again: empty promises, fashion items that turn out to be counterfeits, horse meat in the mincemeat, rejuvenating creams that have no effect, vitamin tablets that work only as placebos, cars that are supposed to be bargains but turn out to be duds, deceptive packaging, and much more. It's always about asking for more money and providing less service. With our God, there is no deceptive packaging or half-truths. With our God, it's always about the whole. When He created the world, He didn't make a single "fake", not a single dud, not a single deception, from the smallest animal to the largest whale. Everything was exactly as He thought it would be and as His Word said it would be. He made everything perfect. It was all about vibrant life! All about joy! And above all, all about true love! All of this without any limits at all!

Because God doesn't do things by halves, Jewish martyrs have died with these words on their lips for thousands of years: *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”* Today, we gather once again around these holy words and pray to the One who makes no mistakes and always acts consistently. We are here because we know that God is real and that He never says anything deceptive. But is our faith in this almighty God truly real? This is a question that Martin Luther grappled with intensely. For years, he observed how people tried to buy forgiveness of sins with money. For years, he tried to force himself to believe. But what about our own faith? Is it sincere or does it have a shelf life that only extends to the church door? So often, our faith turns out to be deceptive. This becomes evident when I prefer to sit in front of the TV instead of reading God's Word or praying. It also becomes apparent when I live among many friends who do not believe in God, and I remain speechless and don't talk to them about it. It is equally obvious when I put my trust solely in my bank account and my own strength, without thinking about God's power with which He created the world. How suitable is my faith for everyday life if I have to say goodbye to this earth with my last breath? When it comes to our

faith, we can know one thing for sure: it is not sincere and does not live up to what it promises. Nevertheless, God demands from us what He Himself gives – total commitment. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might!”* God doesn’t want half-heartedness. He doesn’t want believers who confess with their mouths but speak a completely different language in their thoughts and deeds. God doesn’t desire believers who visit Him only once a year at Christmas and have no other contact with Him. God doesn’t desire believers who, out of tradition or social pressure, put a few cents into the offering plate and place flowers (quickly bought from the gas station) on the altar once a year. God wants you! All that you are: your whole being, your wishes and dreams. But in reality, we don’t want that at all. Instead, we want to be like gods ourselves, making our own decisions. Even when we do something good, it is often only out of a desire to gain recognition for ourselves. Oh no! How horrible for us! Because we are not what we pretend to be.

Then Jesus came! In Him, there was no falsehood, no compromise. He loved God with all His heart and with all His strength. With Him, it was really about the whole! And the amazing thing is that God came to us in Jesus. Jesus turned His face not only entirely to God, but also to us, especially for us and for our sake. In fact, He turned His face FULLY toward us at the same time, and Jesus made that clear again and again. Even when it came to going to people, He didn’t put Himself above our social status and our everyday life. He was right in the midst of us, the complete Jesus. He came to us! And when God comes to people through Jesus, as we already know Him, He doesn't do things by halves. He goes all out. That’s why Jesus touched not only the intellectual and spiritual elite of His time, but all people. That’s why Jesus wasn’t just for the extremely pious or only for those who could understand Him. He came for those people who broke His commandments, yes, even for those who ultimately tried everything they could to kill Him. Jesus’ love, which was made clear in His sacrificial death, is about all people and the whole human being. We should be completely embraced by and saved by God’s love. This is neither a half-truth nor a deception. This is how God did it through Jesus! And this is exactly what Martin Luther rediscovered. Therefore, he couldn’t help but state this truth and many other truths with 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg.

Now we stand here with our half-truths, and God, who gives Himself so unconditionally for us through Jesus. God doesn’t leave this discrepancy between us as it is. Even today, God comes to us completely. Through the Holy Spirit, He even dwells within us. And in our lives, the same Spirit sets clear anchors that are eternally connected to Him. One of these anchors is baptism, through which He makes us His children. The other anchor is Holy Communion, where we receive Jesus’ body and blood. At these points, despite our many differences and imperfections, we become one with God! We may hold on to this, even if Satan wants to unsettle us with his loud interjections. In our everyday life, we may hold on to this certainty. This faith is truly suitable for everyday use and permeates everything, even when we say with our last breaths: *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”* Amen.