

Sermon on Reformation Day Faith, to see, feel, touch and to embrace in one's daily living

Deuteronomy 6, 4-9



4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Loud hammer blows echoed through the city of Wittenberg! Window shutters were raised. People gathered curiously around the monk who had pinned a long document to the church door. What they read shook them to their very bones. Something like this had never happened before, they whispered among themselves. But the monk didn't just nail a few notes to the door; he began to preach. And what he said struck them even deeper. Faith, this monk said, wasn't just a matter for the church but concerned each and every one of us. "And whoever believes these words," Luther summarized, "has what they say: „Namely, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation." And that's why Luther emphasized the importance of constantly meditating on these words while walking, sitting, and lying down, and even memorizing them. Some people argue today about whether or not Luther really nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church. But it was obvious that they would soon appear in poster form. But what few people know is that the catechism was also initially printed in poster form and hung up for all people to read. This meant that the most important teachings of the Church, as such, could be read everywhere. And learned by the people. People could thus visualize what God's Word was saying to them while standing, lying down, or walking. This is exactly how God presented Faith to the Jewish people with the most well-known creed of the Israelites. For the Jewish creed is like a kind of catechism of the Jewish community. It was the creed we just heard:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! 5 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And God commanded that the Jews should keep this creed in their hearts, on their foreheads, and on their right hands, and that they should keep it in their homes,

memorizing it for themselves, and also impressing it on their children. Therefore, at special times of the day, the Jews placed this prayer on their hands and foreheads and recited it. Right hand and forehead means that this confession of faith should shape all my thoughts and actions. And the Israelites believed that every Jew, when praying this, transports himself physically to the foot of Sinai and receives God's commandments personally once again. Likewise, the Israelites understood that the Exodus from Egypt wasn't just in the distant past, but that when they recite the words of the Shema (The Creed of the Jews) Israel, they themselves have crossed the Red Sea again and been saved by God personally. When Luther spread the church's faith everywhere with his catechism posters, this is precisely what he wanted to convey. Christ isn't just to be found in the dark, dusty cabinets of scholars, to whom one has to pay a lot of money to earn God's grace, but we have the crucified one before our eyes, in our minds and hearts. We even died with him and rose with him in a physical sense. Just as he says: "Whoever believes these words has what they say and what they mean." The words spoken of here are not our words but God's words. They are words that we cannot conjure up from within ourselves; rather, they are spoken to us. This is precisely why the Jews bound these words to the doorpost and to our hands and foreheads during prayer. They did this because they knew that these words are the words of the Creator himself. He who speaks and whatever He says comes to pass. In these words of God, there are no half-truths and no empty promises. From the largest whale to the smallest animal, he has not made a single dummy or fake, but everything is genuine, pulsating life. And when this God speaks: "Whoever believes and is baptized is saved," then these words do exactly as they say.

Especially in our age of modern media, it is crucial that we adhere to the words of this living God and allow them to give us life. For other words and images also shape our lives. In our time, we hardly see anyone with God's Holy Commandments bound to their forehead and hand. Instead, they have a mobile phone in their hand. Images and impressions are constantly conveyed from there, shaping the hearts, thoughts, and actions. At home, the television flickers with the same images. And even before going to bed, we check social media one last time to see if there's anything new. These habits are in stark contradiction to what the Israelites' Creed and Luther's poster catechism have shown us. Images come from outside and shape us. And when we are constantly bombarded with political events or any other media, we are shaped and formed by them. The counter-program is God's Word. The counter-program is Luther's Catechism, which we, like the Jews of that time, can memorize, repeat, and recite at certain times of the day.

We do all this because we worship and confess a God who is concerned with the whole and not with half-measures. God wants our whole heart and our whole mind. Because with God there are no half-truths and no half-beliefs, he demands the same of us. But is our faith in Almighty God genuine? Or does it only reach as far as the church door? Yes, so often our faith turns out to be sham and deception. This becomes clear when I would rather sit in front of the television than hear God's Word or pray. It becomes clear when I live among many friends who all don't believe in God, and I remain speechless. It also becomes clear when I place my trust entirely in my bank account and my own strength, not even considering God's power, with which he made the whole world. And how practical is my faith then when I have to say goodbye to this world with my last breath? Yes, when it comes to our faith, we can be absolutely certain of one thing: It is neither genuine nor does it keep its promises. Nor is it whole. It is a faith under attack. Martin

Luther, too, experienced this challenge. He, too, was repeatedly distracted from God and his Christ, and sometimes, sunk into deep depression, he cried out his distress to God.

And then Jesus came! Jesus came to the Jews of that time, who had sought and confessed God for generations. And he came to Martin Luther as well. In Jesus there was no falsehood. There were no half measures. He loved God with all his heart and with all his strength. With Him, it was truly about completeness! And the wonderful thing is that in Jesus, God also came completely to us humans. Not only did Jesus turn his face completely to God, but he also turned his face completely to us. Then he didn't stand far above our lives and our everyday lives, but was in the midst of them and among us! And when God comes to us humans through Jesus, He, as we already know Him, doesn't do this half-heartedly. He goes all the way. That's why Jesus touches us not only now and then and when we deserve it, but especially when we don't deserve it and are torn apart by our sins. Yes, Jesus accepts sinners wholeheartedly! And that's precisely why Martin Luther repeatedly emphasized the cross and baptism in capital letters, so as to inscribe it firmly in our hearts and minds: **He did this for me**. And Martin Luther had to keep this fact in mind and keep it in mind again and again. In the morning when he got up and in the evening when he went to bed. The cross was always on his hand and before his eyes.

And so, with reference to the Christmas story, Martin Luther was able to express that Jesus, through his Word, is not only laid in a manger but in our heart. Martin Luther writes: "This means that Christ is swaddled in the Scriptures through and through, just as the body is laid in the manger. The manger is the sermon in which He lies and is composed, and from which one takes food and nourishment." And we now want to hold this Christ, who comes to us so directly, in our hands, in our hearts, in our minds, and everywhere we go. Amen.