14 July 2019 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 5 Vienna, VA

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"Be Different!"
Text: Leviticus 18:1-5; 19:9-18; Luke 10:25-37

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Be different! That's the message from God to you today. **Be different**. Don't be like the people around you. Don't do what they do. You, **be different**.

That's what God told Old Testament Israel in the reading from Leviticus we heard today. They were camping at Mt. Sinai. God had just brought them out from Egypt, rescued them from their long slavery there. And He promised them their own home, their own land. A good land. Where they could live in peace. But when you get there, He tells them, **be different!** Don't do what the people of Egypt did, or what the people of this new land do. Don't worship the gods they worshiped in Egypt, or the gods the people of this new land worship. **Be different**.

And He says how. Specifically. Don't reap your fields, God says, right up to the very edge, and don't strip your vineyards clean of every last grape. Leave some. For the poor and needy. 80 percent, 90 percent, you can have. But leave some. For the poor. For those who have nothing. ***I am the Lord***.

Then, He says, don't idolize the almighty denarius. Don't oppress your neighbor, lie, cheat, steal, or take him to court for a buck. And don't become possessed with revenge if you are wronged, if he short-changed you in some way, whether that be with money or respect or some other way. Relax. I'm giving you a home and your own land. And I'm going to continue to take care of you. Don't sin because someone sinned against you. ***I am the Lord***.

And don't take advantage of the deaf or the blind. **Be different**. Don't be like everyone else. Don't be like the world. **Because you're not**. You're mine. I brought you up out of Egypt. I brought you through the Red Sea. ***I am the Lord your God***. So act like it. Like you're special, because you are. Like you're rich, because you are. Like this world is not all there is, because it's not. Like you're different, because you are. ***I am the Lord***.

I am the Lord. Sometimes when we hear that phrase, I think we hear it like parents say it. Like when children ask their parents why they have to do something, what do parents say? *Because I said so!* And here, too. Why does Israel have to do these things? Because

I am the Lord! Because I say so! I'm the almighty, the Sovereign, the rule maker, the boss.

Except that not how God means it at all! ***I am the Lord*** is like the Invocation we hear at the beginning of every Divine Service here - *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. Which, as I told the Bible Class again recently, is not a sentence. It's a prepositional phrase. It's only part of a sentence. And the rest of it is really important. For the rest of it is: **I baptize you** *in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. The Invocation is a reminder of who you are and what God has done for you. You are a baptized child of God. You are one whose sins are forgiven. You have been washed with the blood of the Lamb in those waters. And so here, we are children coming to our Father. To be with Him. To receive from Him. To hear from Him and speak to Him. We are special. Because of His Name given to us and put on us, **we are different**.

And so Israel was different. ***I am the Lord*** is only part of a sentence for them. They were to hear those words and finish them as a reminder of who they are and what God has done for them. ***I am the Lord*** who brought you out of Egypt. ***I am the Lord*** who brought you through the Red Sea. ***I am the Lord*** who is giving you a home. Those words are Gospel, not Law! They are what God has done and is doing for us, not do this because I said so! These words mark Israel as **different**. Because they are. They are the Lord's.

So act that way.

And then the very next words we speak, here, after the Invocation in the Divine Service? *I haven't*. We confess that we haven't lived differently than the world. We've done what they do, say what they say, and worship what they worship. Oh, we really do. We have worshiped the almighty dollar at the expense of prayers, devotions, and families. We have been stingy with the poor and needy. We think of ourselves first. And interestingly, sports stars, politicians, the rich and powerful, the high and mighty, the famous and well-known, what do we call what happens to them? They are *idolized*. Because they are. Made into idols. They are what we want to be, and try to be, and . . . *walk on each other to be?* And child of God? Oh, yeah, well, I am that too, **but** . . . that's not enough. I want more. I need more. I'm going to get more. *Oh Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner*.

Israel had to confess the same as we do. That's why when Moses was on Mt. Sinai, God didn't just give him the commandments, but the Tabernacle, too. Which was the place of forgiveness. The place where God would dwell with His people to mercy them. That's what made them different, too. Not only what God had done for them and was continuing to do for them, but that He was dwelling with them, and caring for them, and forgiving them. And because He was, they could care for others. The poor and needy, the deaf and blind, and love their neighbor. Because ***I am the Lord.*** Because they have a good and gracious Lord, caring for *them* and forgiving *them*.

So they were **different**. You are **different**. You are forgiven. So you get to act that way. Not because it's the rules, it's the Law, and you have to to please God and make up for your sins. No. It's because **you are free to be different**. You've been freed, mercied, forgiven. So now you get to live that way.

And what would that look like? **To be different**, because you are? Well, it would look like the Good Samaritan. Which is a parable, I think, that is as often misunderstood as the phrase ***I am the Lord***. Just as ***I am the Lord*** is not God saying *because I said so*, but rather, because of all that I have done for you, so the Good Samaritan is not just a parable telling us to be good Samaritans, but teaching us **that we have one**.

You see, that lawyer who came up to Jesus to test him that day, thought he could do something to live - he just needed to know what it was, and how much it was. And even though Jesus didn't put a lawyer in the parable, he did put a couple of his friends in it - a priest and a levite. And I wonder if the lawyer had done this on his way to see Jesus - passed by a man in a ditch, someone in need, because, well, he had to get to Jesus with his question! That would be like Jesus to do something like that. *Mr. Lawyer, what you should have done is stop and help that person you saw in the ditch but passed by on the other side of the road in your hurry here to see me and ask me what you have to do to inherit eternal life when God is the one who gives you eternal life and you don't have to do anything and so you should have stopped to help this man, because you can!* The only thing Jesus could've added at the end but didn't is: ***I am the Lord.***

But if He had, with that He would have meant two things: **First**, ***I am the Lord*** who spoke those words to Moses on Mt. Sinai, who did all those things for Israel, and who made great and precious promises to them - I am that Lord! And **second**, ***I am the Lord*** who has come now to do them, fulfill them all for you, be your Good Samaritan. Because Mr. Lawyer, you can't. You're the guy in the ditch. You <congregation> *were* the guy in the ditch. Beat up and robbed of life by your sins, by death, and by the devil. And what good would it do to yell at that guy in the ditch to get up and clean himself up and save himself? Not much, right? He needed something, He needed someone. He needed saving.

But what do you think the guy in the ditch did *after* he was saved? After he recovered and got better? What do you think he did weeks or months later . . . the next time he was walking down the road and saw a man in a ditch like he was? Do you think he stopped, looked around, and wondered: *Where is that Samaritan when you need one?* Or do you think he was **different**? Do you think he did likewise? As it had been done to him? Not because he had to, but because he could? Because he knows what its like to lie in that ditch and watch people walk by and not help? Yeah.

So every week, this church is filled with people in the ditch. The devil, the world, and your own sinful nature have attacked you and inflicted mortal wounds on you. And

perhaps you have on others - intentionally or unintentionally, known or unknown. Wounds that if not treated lead to death. And we confess, and we cry out for help. And our Good Samaritan is here, and comes down in the ditch with us, just as He did some 2000 years ago, when He came down and was attacked and beaten and not just left for dead, *He really was!* With your death, in your grave, because of your sin. But not as a victim was He dead, but as Saviour. As the one come to rescue all in the grip of sin, death, and hell. By coming and getting us, washing us, feeding us, putting us on His own back, and saving us. And He still does. Here. To make us **different**. Healed. Whole. Saved. Forgiven.

So live that. Act that way. **Be different**. Like you've been saved. Because you are.

You see, the Christian life isn't one of asking *what must I do to inherit eternal life?* Or *what must I do to be saved?* You have eternal life now. You've been saved. Jesus did that for you. You've been un-ditched, lifted up, lifted out, oiled and wined, healed, restored, given a new life.

So now, the Christian life is a joyous one of jumping down into the ditches of others, no matter who they are. To un-ditch them. And there are plenty of ditches. Lots of them. If we're not too busy to see them, too pre-occupied with our own stuff. People in ditches at work, at school, your friends and neighbors, on your teams, on your social medias. **Be different** for them. And by being different for them, you will be the same . . . as Jesus for you. The one whose ***steadfast love endures forever***, as we sang in the Introit. Whose love and forgiveness and grace and gifts and mercy for you will never run out.

Last week I didn't say anything about the Higer Things conference that Joanna and I had just returned from, and that Rachel and Kathryn will be at this week. I often do, but I waited until this week because the Chief Hymn, or Sermon Hymn we sang today, *Where Charity and Love Prevail* (LSB #845), was the conference hymn, or the theme hymn for the week. For the theme for the conference was Corcordia, with one heart, which is what the Good Samaritan was with the man in the ditch, and what Jesus is with us. But this, too: the motto of Higher Things is: *Dare to be Lutheran*. Or, if we wanted to put it this way today: **Dare to be different**. Dare to live as one saved by grace through faith alone, and not by what you do. Dare to live this Gospel in all your life. Dare to believe that this really is true, and that it defines us and makes us who we are. Because ***I am the Lord*** who has done everything for you. ***I am the Lord*** who rescued you from your slavery to sin and set you free. ***I am the Lord*** who brought you through the waters of baptism, where you were saved but where your sin and guilt were slain. ***I am the Lord*** who feeds you not with manna, but with bread that is the Body of Jesus, and gives you wine to drink that is His blood. ***I am the Lord.***

So go, you are different. Go, you are mine. Go, you are un-ditched. Go, you are free.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.