

The Second Sunday after Michaelmas (Trinity 20) – Pr. Faugstad sermon
2 Kings 18:1-12: “We Hold Fast to the LORD.”
October 11/12, 2025 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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You, my Lord Jesus, are my righteousness; I am Your sin.
You have taken from me what is mine and have given me what is Yours.
You became what You were not and made me to be what I was not. Amen. (Martin Luther)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is written in the eighteenth chapter of the Second Book of Kings. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan). He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD. He did not depart from following Him, but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses. And the LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city. / In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it, and at the end of three years he took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria and put them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God but transgressed His covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. They neither listened nor obeyed. (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who joined Himself to us by taking on our flesh, and who joins us to Him through Holy Baptism, so that all that is ours became His, and all that is His became ours, dear fellow redeemed:

The best way to teach people the value of marriage is to value your marriage. Valuing your marriage means treating your spouse with love and respect, being willing to forgive when you are wronged, and doing the hard work of communication when you'd rather just play the blame game. This has a powerful influence on children and others who witness what a healthy marriage looks like.

When the opposite happens, when spouses run each other down, refuse to forgive, stop communicating, and possibly even get divorced, this also has a powerful influence. You have probably heard the statistics that children of divorced parents are significantly more likely to get divorced themselves later in life. These patterns certainly can be broken, but it is more difficult to see the way forward to a healthy relationship for those who have witnessed the opposite.

The same goes for transmitting our faith. The degree that we value what we have received by the grace of God will be shown by the priority it has in our life. Do our children, our classmates, our co-workers, our neighbors hear us speak about the comfort and hope we have in Christ? Do we keep the Word in our homes through prayer and family devotions? Do we plan everything else in our schedule around the Divine Service, giving first place to God's Word and Sacraments?

I think each of us would acknowledge that what Jesus has done has not always been first place in our lives. We have spoken and acted in ways that are not at all consistent with the Christian faith. We have made money, or popularity, or fun and games the most important thing. We have relegated our Christian faith to an hour or two each week, easily picked up and easily set aside again.

The way we approach the faith as adults has a huge influence on the way our children will approach it when they are adults. The more important it is to us, the more important it will be to them. We can carry a lot of guilt over this because we never do as much to encourage the faith in our families as we know we should. St. Paul expressed this struggle in Romans 7: *"For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing"* (v. 19).

Our comfort is knowing that Jesus forgives all our failures in the past and all our weaknesses in the present. Despite our faults, He still calls us each day to try again, try harder, and pray unceasingly for His help and strength. We also have the comfort of knowing that God loves our family members even more than we do, and He does not forget them. We might feel as though we have made a mess of everything in our homes, but God still works all things for good (Rom. 8:28).

Today's reading gives us an example of the powerful grace of God. We are introduced to Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah. King Ahaz was anything but a good father. He was a spiritual man, but it was the wrong spirit. He did not worship the LORD, the true God. He worshipped the gods of the heathen nations around Judah. He set up images of the Baals, made sacrifices in the high places, and closed up the doors of the temple. He even followed the pagan practice of offering some of his sons as burnt offerings to try to appease the gods (1Chr. 28).

Because of the grievous sins of Ahaz, *"the LORD humbled Judah..., for he had made Judah act sinfully and had been very unfaithful to the LORD"* (28:19). When he died, he was not given an honorable burial with the previous kings of Judah since he had brought such trouble on the land and its people.

So then at age twenty-five, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz began to reign. He took a very different course than his father, possibly because of the influence of his mother who is named in today's

reading—Abi the daughter of Zechariah. Wherever the good influence came from, Hezekiah *“did what was right in the eyes of the LORD”* by undoing all that his father had done wrong. *“He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah.”* Then he did something even more extreme: *“he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it.”*

That bronze serpent was some 700 years old at this time, and it was made by Moses himself! When initially the people looked up to it on a pole, trusting in the LORD’s promise, they were spared from the poisonous serpents that afflicted them (Num. 21:9). This was a significant piece of Israel’s history, but it had become an object of their worship, so Hezekiah destroyed it. Can you imagine destroying a significant artifact from the 1300s because it was leading people astray? How about a precious family heirloom, or another item of great value? If you think about the most important object you possess, would you destroy it out of devotion to the LORD?

Hezekiah made it clear that nothing would get in the way of the worship of the true God. Our reading says, *“He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD.”* The word translated, “held fast,” is the same word we find with the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

This is how Hezekiah “held fast” to the LORD: like a man and his wife “hold fast” to each other. Hezekiah did what was right by the LORD; he avoided temptations to sin; he trusted the LORD and did not depart from following Him; he did the opposite of the Israelites to the north who were conquered by the Assyrians—he listened to and obeyed the LORD.

This is how each one of us should be toward God. We hold fast to Him by respecting, honoring, and trusting Him in all things. We avoid everything that could tempt us away from Him. We look for help, healing, and salvation nowhere else than from Him. We acknowledge that there is no lasting love, no happiness, no life apart from Him.

The picture of a marriage is exactly how St. Paul describes our connection to Christ. *“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish”* (Eph. 5:25-27). This tells us that all that we were in our wickedness and weakness, Jesus has covered in His perfect righteousness.

Imagine a highly-regarded, virtuous, successful man choosing for his bride a lady with a bad reputation, no possessions, and no prospects for a productive future. That is what Jesus did by taking on our human flesh and offering up His perfect life in payment for all our sin. The righteous One gave Himself for us unrighteous ones, the holy One for the unholy. He took all our sins on Himself and gave us His perfect record of keeping God’s Law. He did this, so we might be as He is and live forever with Him in His heavenly kingdom.

Today's Holy Gospel speaks about our invitation to the wedding feast of the King's Son (Mat. 22:1-14). This is the invitation to believe in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and to receive His heavenly and eternal riches. But some respond to the invitation with disinterest – they think they have better things to do. Others react with violence and attack the servants who bring the invitation to them. Still others want to attend the feast on their own terms, wearing their own righteousness, which is a great insult to the merciful and gracious King.

But despite our sins, the invitation to join the wedding feast still comes to us. We sit down at this feast each time we hear the Word of our Lord and receive the rich food of His body and blood for the remission of our sins. His Word and Sacraments are how, like a good husband, our Savior Jesus serves us. He does not treat us as our sins against Him deserve.

Though we have often been unfaithful to Him and His Word and pursued other priorities to the detriment of our faith, our relationships, and our homes, He forgives every one of these sins. He has mercy on us in our weakness; He treats us with patience and love; He communicates clearly and regularly His commitment to us. He perfectly does His part to keep His marriage with the Church healthy and strong.

His willingness to serve and sacrifice is what makes us want to **Hold Fast to the LORD**. Like a faithful bride, we love Him, we submit to His authority, and we want to please Him by all that we think, say, and do. We seek no other Bridegroom, no other Savior. No one could ever love us so well and care for us as perfectly as He does.

This was Hezekiah's confidence. *"He trusted in the LORD"* and *"held fast"* to Him, and the people of Judah were blessed by his faithfulness. When we do the same by the grace of God, our marriages, our homes, and our communities are likewise blessed. Then it is said of us as it was said of Hezekiah: *"And the LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered."*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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