

## The Heritage of the Lord

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Old Testament reading. **Moses said to the Lord, “For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.”** Here ends our text.

Today we’re celebrating Heritage Sunday. Heritage is defined as something that is passed down from a predecessor. A heritage is often shared. A family’s heritage is their shared culture, history, religion, artifacts, and way of life that’s been passed down from their ancestors. Dr. Rast has been sharing our common heritage of faith as we celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. This year we’ve also been sharing our congregation’s heritage in celebrating Trinity’s 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The display tables in the parish hall show how the Lutheran faith has been passed down to us – Bibles and catechisms in German and then English, pictures of a progression of church and school buildings, and books, clippings, and documents which record our church’s history. Most memorable are the pictures of the people, our fathers and mothers in the faith in the photographs and pictorial directories – first black and white and then color. Our confirmation book shows the pictures of the last ninety years of confirmands, the pastors and teachers who taught them the Lutheran faith, and the words of the small catechism that they memorized. You might say that the tables on the southeast wall of the parish hall are our “wall of faith.”

Our Epistle reading today from Hebrews has often been described, not as the “Hall of Fame,” but as the “Hall of Faith.” Here we see how God’s first promise to Adam and Eve to send a Savior was passed down to their son Abel and then to Enoch and all the patriarchs to Abraham. They shared a common heritage of faith in the Lord and His promises. They shared a common worship of proclaiming God’s Word and the Old Testament Sacrament of the sacrifices. They shared the fruits of their faith in how they lived a godly life to the Lord. They passed down this heritage of faith and belief from generation to generation in the Holy Christian Church.

You probably have a “Hall of Faith” or “Wall of Faith” in your home. Hanging on the walls and in your hallway, you have photographs of your ancestors who may have passed on the Lutheran faith to you. You have family pictures of baptisms and confirmations and weddings at church. And I share this common heritage with you. I’m 58 years old, and I’ve been a member of this congregation for 45 of those years. My great-grandfather on my dad’s side, Rev. Henry Traub, was pastor here in the 1920’s. My mom was a teacher in our Lutheran school here, and her father, Oscar Scheerger, was teacher and principle here in the 1950’s. I was baptized at this font by Pastor Omar Rau and my sponsors were Chuck Fellwock and the sainted Ivan Wortmann. I shared many of the same teachers in our Lutheran school – Wilma Fehd, Bernita Klausmeier, her daughter Mary Ann Kraft, Stephen Mearling, and Loren Doehrmann. We shared many of the same Sunday school teachers – Toleda Ehler, Helen Wortmann, Ruth Letterman, Chet Behrman, Les Pries, Wayne and Karon Wathen, Jim Kahre, and Ken Temme. I was confirmed at this altar by Pastor Loren Boettcher, and I was installed as your pastor by our former pastor, Pastor Martin Keller. These were the folks who passed on the heritage of the Lutheran faith to me and to many of you. They are just a few of the members of Trinity’s “Hall of Faith.”

Now, I’ve been Trinity’s pastor here for the last eight years. It’s not very common for a son of the congregation to be a pastor at his home church and here’s why. You knew all my sins, and yet you called me anyway. And I knew all your sins, and yet I accepted the Call anyway. Which brings us to another point. Besides passing down our heritage of faith to future generations, we also pass down our heritage of sin. Besides celebrating God’s grace, we must also acknowledge our sin and sinful nature passed down to us from our ancestors. Our congregation and its history also include its share of

conflict between clergy and laity, church and school, parishioners and principles, members and non-members. We share the common fault of being gossips, grumblers, and complainers.

But this is the same sinful nature that's existed in every church, passed down as a heritage since Adam and Eve's fall into sin. This sinful heritage was manifested in our Old Testament reading today where Moses recounts the Israelites' golden calf incident at Mt. Sinai. The Lord had just passed down His Ten Commandments to His people, and they had immediately responded with idolatry. The Lord was about to destroy them all for their sin when Moses interceded for them. Moses prayed to the Lord, **"O Lord GOD, destroy not your people and your heritage, whom you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. For they are your people and your heritage."** Moses reminds the Lord of the gracious heritage He passed down to the Israelites in redeeming them from their slavery in Egypt. But Moses also gives an odd reason for sparing the Israelites. He tells the Lord that these people are YOUR heritage. How could the Israelites ever be the Lord's heritage? What were these sinners passing down to the eternal Lord as His heritage? What did the Lord share in common with this sinful humanity? And why would Moses' argument stay the Lord's hand from destroying these sinners?

The answer is in our Gospel reading today. This may be the only time that the entire genealogy of Jesus from Matthew with all those hard to pronounce names has ever been read from the lectern in this church, but my point is this. All those names were the heritage of Jesus Christ, the Lord. Though Jesus is the eternal Son of God, these people were His ancestors. The one who is God shared a common humanity with His people. What did Jesus' ancestors pass down to Him as His heritage? Certainly, the Old Testament Scriptures with the promises of the Messiah. Certainly, the Jewish worship practices and ceremonies of circumcision and Temple sacrifices. But these ancestors also passed on to Jesus their tradition of sin. This list is not so much a "Hall of Faith" or even a "Hall of Fame" but a "Hall of Infamy." It's a list of sinners: Jacob the deceiver, Judah the incester, Rahab the prostitute, David the adulterer and murderer, Solomon the polygamist, Manasseh the child sacrificer, and generations of idolaters who were exiled to Babylon. Of course, this list of sinners could just as well be your family tree or our church and synod – an entire wall of mugshots, warts and all.

Here you go Lord. These sinners are your people and your heritage, who have passed on to You all their sins. Indeed, Jesus shared in our humanity and is like us in every way, but He Himself was without sin. So why doesn't the Lord destroy these degenerate relatives like He said He was going to do at Mt. Sinai? Why doesn't the Lord destroy us? Same answer as Moses. These sinners "are your people and your heritage . . . whom you have redeemed." Redeemed, not by the Lord's great power and outstretched arm against the Egyptians at the Red Sea, but redeemed by the Lord stretching out His arms on the cross and suffering for us. All the sins of Jesus' ancestors all the way back to Adam and Eve and even all the sins of His posterity, yours and mine, were passed on to Jesus. All the sins of all the people of the world, past, present, and future were laid upon the righteous Son of God at the cross. This was the Lord's heritage which all humanity passed down to Him.

But through the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus now passes down His heritage to us. In the great reversal, Jesus takes our sin and then gives us his righteousness. Jesus passes down to us His goodness, His perfection, and His holiness with all its benefits. We receive from Him our inheritance of eternal life. Jesus takes our Old Man and our history of sin off the wall of infamy and places our New Man with the fruits of faith into His hall of saints. The Lord rejoices to have us as His people and as His heritage. In a miraculous and divine way, the Lord is our heritage and at the same time we are the heritage of the Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.