**Sermon for Proper 14-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

08-10-25

Hebrews 11:1–16

 Many Christians consider themselves “the New Testament people of God.” They don’t give much thought to the Old Testament, even going so far as to think that it doesn’t apply to us anymore.

 This would, of course make one wonder why we even have the Old Testament as a part of the Bible in the first place.

They don’t stop to consider that, during his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ preached from the Old Testament. In fact, the apostles and pastors of the first century church all preached and taught from the Old testament.

In the early assemblies of Christians, as the Gospels were written, they were passed around and copied, along with the epistles; the letters to the early churches.

All of these writings, mostly from the Apostles themselves, are divinely inspired and without error. They are the word of God, and were eventually assembled together to comprise what we now call the New Testament.

The Old Testament is also the divinely inspired, inerrant word of God. We tend to forget that, before there was a so-called New Testament, the Old Testament was simply “the testament.”

What does this mean? It means that, being God’s holy word, the message of both the old and the new testaments are the same.

 Both speak of the Anointed One; the Messiah; the Christ; the one to redeem lost and fallen mankind from its captivity to sin and Satan, and rescue it from eternal damnation and the torments of hell.

“But,” you ask, “what about all of the requirements in the Old Testament?” “What about all of those laws that the Jewish people had to keep?”

Certainly, they had a lot that they were supposed to keep up with. There were required observations throughout the year, for example, the Passover.

 There were all sorts of blood sacrifices and offerings to be made; and they could only be made at the temple in Jerusalem. There was no other place to fulfill those requirements.

 Beyond the temple, there were synagogues; places where God’s people gathered together to hear God’s word, and pray, and hear teachers expound on the Scriptures.

Before Jesus, this is what obedience and worship of God looked like, and, although the Jewish people were all doing these things, not all of them were people of God.

Just like today, while many people claim to be Christians, and many people gather together to hear God’s word, and pray, and hear teachers expound on the Scriptures, not all of them are people of God.

This side of heaven, until Christ’s return, there are always going to be weeds, among the wheat; hypocrites, who don’t actually believe the Scriptures. The difference between them and the elect is faith.

*1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2For by it the people of old received their commendation.*

 The thing that all of God’s people have in common is faith. It is faith that takes the revelation of God as given to us through the holy Scriptures, and makes it our own. God reckons this faith to us as righteousness.

Before Christ came, God had already given his people the promise of redemption through the One whom he would send. The “Old Testament people” did not understand exactly how the Messiah would accomplish this, but they looked forward in faith to the promised redemption, just like you and I.

 As “New Testament people,” we have the luxury of looking back, and seeing through the Scriptures that the promised Messiah has come, and he has redeemed all mankind through the sacrifice of Himself.

 Along with all of the people of God, we embrace this redemption, and make it our own, through faith.

In fact, the people of God walked by faith before any Scripture was ever written. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses wrote Genesis, the first book of the Bible, as God revealed to him how the creation came to be in the first place, and how corruption, that is, sin, entered this once perfect creation. As God’s elect, we accept as true the Genesis account.

*3By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

Not everyone takes the six twenty- four hour day creation account as historical fact. Many try to either hybridize Scripture with science, or reject outright the Genesis account as one more example of ancient tales and legends.

 It is a bold position to stand on Scripture as the very word of God, inspired and without error. In fact, many Christian denominations have retreated from this solid ground.

We see the result of their compromises, as those denominations continue to retreat away from Christ, and the sure promise of the Gospel, falling right back into the captivity of sin, Satan, and the ways of this fallen world.

When we stand on God’s word alone, we stand on the promise of Christ, because all Scripture points to Him. Jesus Himself even said this. To the hypocrites who challenged him, he told them; [You seek wisdom in the Scriptures, and these all testify of Me.]

To his disciples after his resurrection, we hear from the Gospel of Luke; “and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

When we hear God’s word and believe it, this makes all of the difference. Worship, Bible study, personal devotions, these are not academic, but spiritual exercises.

They are intended to grow and mature your faith unto righteousness; faith in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life given to you through Jesus Christ, the center of all Scripture; faith in paradise to come, and faith in God’s sure provision for you now in all things.

Because, though we are sinful, he is merciful, and though we deserve no good thing, he gives us everything necessary for life in this world, and in the world to come.

The elect people of old related to God in the very same way as you and I; through faith, and faith alone. *6And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Our epistle text gives us a chronological litany of landmark people of faith; Abel; Enoch; Noah; Abraham; Sarah. What’s most important for us here is how our epistle sums up their mortal lives;

 *13These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*

These were elect people of God, living their lives by faith and faith alone, going where God led them; doing as God directed.

Yet, even though they had the benefit of God’s direct revelation to them, they were people just like you and me.

 Their walk of faith was not without suffering, not without their own dark nights of the soul, in which they questioned, complained, and even sought to do things their own way, only to create a mess.

Repenting of their sins, and returning to God, he always received them, always forgave them, always loved them. Just as he does for you and me. These all lived and died in the faith.

*Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

The city of God; the new creation, of which all repentant believers in Christ are citizens, though until His return, we can only look forward to this new, eternal life by faith, and faith alone.

 We shall receive the promise at the very same time as all of those Old Testament people of God; at the Last Day; at Christ’s return.

 Then, we will enjoy a new, sinless creation; and new, eternal bodies without sin, completely innocent and walking with God, joyfully serving him and each other in perfect love.

Though none of us can even begin to imagine what exactly this will be like, I am convinced that we will have the pleasure of actually meeting those patriarchs, matriarchs, apostles, prophets, and other superstars of the faith in person, for we are a family; we are all members of God’s household.

We have no idea what heaven will actually be like, but we do know that, even now, the souls of all who have fallen asleep in the faith now await, in the presence of Jesus Christ, His return with glory to judge both the living and the dead, at which time they, and all of us, will receive our eternal bodies.

Meanwhile, the love of Christ within us should direct our works. But our works do not make us right with God; only the work of Jesus Christ crucified has made us right with God.

 He calls us to repent and believe, and live our lives as God’s elect have always lived; by faith in Christ alone. *1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

May our Lord Jesus Christ keep us steadfast in that God-given faith, until our faith becomes sight. Amen.