

Pentecost 14 – August 30, 2015
Text: Deuteronomy 4:1-2
Theme: Heartburn? Try the Gospel

Heartburn is one of the joys of middle age and I don't mean that panty waist little heartburn I got when I was a kid and ate too much spicy food. I mean the nuclear fusion that starts occurring around age 35 after you ate a big Mexican dinner at 9:00 pm and you wake up in the wee hours of the morning wishing you were having a heart attack because at least you could go to the hospital and have something done about it. You stumble out of bed in search of the Maalox, or Tums, or whatever your drug of choice is and then you feel that glorious cooling as the medicine hits the acid and stops the nuclear reaction.

Heartburn reminds me of sin. Jesus makes it clear that sin is not something that comes into us but something that is created inside of us. Some people fear things in the world because they might corrupt them. There are whole religious communities that are geared to avoid the world in order to avoid sin. The problem is that you can run but you cannot hide. Many Christians are no different. Some people fear drugs. Some fear R rated movies. Some fear being corrupted or having their children corrupted by "the wrong kind of people." While none of those things are necessarily good, they are not to be feared because they cannot harm us. All they can do is stir

up the sin that is already in us. I've got news for you. Unless someone holds you down and pours that booze down your throat, no one can make you drink, or smoke or eat fatty food for that matter. Sin boils in our hearts day and night looking for a catalyst whereby it can jump out and create some harm. Sin is like that stomach acid that lies in wait for that big Mexican dinner at 9:00 pm. Think of sin as having the worst indigestion you have ever had. The sweet, healing Gospel of Jesus Christ is like a great big glug of Maalox. You know the feeling you get when that medicine finally hits the acid and starts cooling you down? That's exactly how the Gospel is for sin. The Gospel neutralizes sin.

As Moses prepared his people to enter the Promised Land in today's Old Testament reading, he knew they were headed for a world where sin was not only tolerated but encouraged. Sound familiar? Imagine a world where God's description of how things are is just ignored for the convenience of human beings. Imagine a world where courts make judgements that conflict with God's Word. Imagine a world where people accept anything as okay and there is no absolute truth. Sound familiar? Imagine a world where the poor are on their own to starve or survive but it was their own fault for being poor. Imagine a world where the rich get richer and richer and obscenely richer and they are admired for it. Imagine a world

where the leaders build monuments to themselves while the people suffer in the shadow of the leaders' temples. Sound familiar? This is the world of the Canaanites into which Moses' people were about to enter and this is the world of the Babylonians where the people of God would be sent several hundred years later and this is Europe of the 16th Century when a loudmouth monk named Martin spoke up... and this is now. Moses knew that there was no way his people were going to be able to avoid the evil that awaited them. He knew that evil would tempt their sinful natures to respond. Sin would rise up in them like acid to greet the sin all around them.

So, Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy means "second Law" and this causes us some confusion because it is not really a second law or just a second statement of the Law. In the Hebrew Bible, the book is called *Debarim*. It means "The Words" and by the title it is implied the words of the author, Moses, speaking for God. The Hebrews saw this book, not as a second Law but as an inspirational speech from their beloved leader of over 40 years, a goodbye as he was about to leave them and die on Mount Nebo before they crossed into the Promised Land.

These are the last Words of Moses and instead of writing a book of warnings, he wrote a book reminding them of God's promises to be with them, to lead them and guide them and

eventually to save them through the Messiah. This is not Law as in rules, but Law as in promise. Moses knew that we can never avoid sin. It is all around us. Luther learned that even if we cloister ourselves in the thick walls of a monastery, sin is still there because sin does not come from without, but from within. The temptations are out there but the raw acid is within us. We cannot hide from sin but we can overcome it. We can consume the sweet Gospel that will cool the sin boiling within us. Moses said,

“And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you.” God’s Law gives life and power. Moses goes on.

“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you...” Beware! People will try to twist what God says to fit their own sinful desires. Keep reading, studying, hearing the Word and ask, what does the word say? It is so clear. Moses goes on.

“Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god

so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and just decrees so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?"

None of man's gods is a god like ours. Allah is a law giver and demanding task master. Buddha is a self-righteous prig who thinks he is enlightened because he made up his own rules and kept them. Brahman is not even a person but a higher principle. There is no god like our God who is a real person, who loves us unconditionally and heals us with his love, chiefly seen in his sacrifice of his own son on the cross in our place. Moses goes on.

"Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children..." Never forget. As you wade through the temptation that is all around you, never forget that God loves you more than anything in this world. Receive the gifts of his Word and Sacrament and feel the acid of sin quelled, pushed down and extinguished by the love of God shown to you in Jesus Christ.