

Sermon — 10/25/20
(Reformation Sunday/LWML Sunday)

Text — Genesis 19:24-25

Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus He overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.

Theme — “Sodom and Gomorrah”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the last Sunday in October, which means it is Reformation Sunday. As you can tell by our special order of service, today is also our celebration of LWML Sunday. And after services today, we have a baptism at each church. So, with all that going on today, what is our sermon text? Why, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, of course!

Now, I could lie and tell you that I had some idea on tying all those together when I did the monthly sermon planning, but I did not. The fact of the matter is, we did not decide upon today as our LWML Sunday until just a couple of weeks ago. Those baptisms were not on the horizon until earlier this month. And I was not really looking at the church calendar when I mapped out these Old Testament Sunday School sermons at the end of the summer. No, these events all just kind of happened to fall on today’s date. So, let’s talk about Sodom and Gomorrah and then see if we can maybe make some connection to those other events we are celebrating today. (pause)

We heard of Sodom and Gomorrah a few weeks back, when Abraham’s nephew Lot chose to locate there. You may remember why: Lot saw that the plain on which these cities were built was exceedingly lush and fertile — like the Garden of Eden, the Bible says. In addition to that, the cities of the plain — especially Sodom and Gomorrah — were rich and populous and exciting. Of course, THAT

would be a welcome change of pace to the nomadic life Lot had been leading for a number of years. Perhaps he missed the bright lights and culture of a city (remember, he and Abraham were city-dwellers before God's call). Perhaps he saw an opportunity to get rich by supplying all those city folks with produce from his immense herds and flocks. Perhaps he simply was drawn to the stability of being able to settle down again. But in any case, Lot chose to live in Sodom. And that was a mistake.

A mistake, because the petty kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities on the plain soon decided to rebel against their overlord. And that brought war. And Lot and his family were caught in the middle of it. The overlord swooped in, defeated the cities in battle, and carried off numerous captives — including, apparently, Lot. When Abraham heard the news, he gathered up his own men — shepherds and herdsmen and servants, not trained warriors — and went out to rescue Lot. And the rest of the captives. Now, obviously, an old man with a small bunch of untrained shepherds does not sound like much of an army. But remember, these men fought for the Lord — or, I should say, He fought for them. So, the result was a foregone conclusion: Abraham and his little band miraculously defeat the mighty king and force him to release the captives.

Now, you would think that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah would be thankful, right? You would think that they would be impressed with the God who gave such a victory — especially since their own gods had failed them. You would think they would have learned a lesson in humility, at the very least. But you would be wrong. For immediately the men of Sodom and Gomorrah go back to their wicked, evil, perverted ways. They had no love for Abraham. Or for Lot. Or for their God. No, they were the men of Sodom! They would do whatever they wanted to do.

And so they did. Wicked, horrible things. Things that were so offensive that God eventually told Abraham that the outcry against these men and their sin had risen to heaven. And so, God said, He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He would rain down fire from the heavens and totally wipe

those cities off the face of the earth. It was completely justified; the men of Sodom and Gomorrah WERE reprobates and ingrates and rebels, against God and man.

And what does Abraham do when the Lord tells him this news? Well, Abraham pleads for them! Imagine that. Abraham has the temerity, the courage, the love of his fellow-man to argue with God over their fate! He bargains and horse-trades and deals with the Lord. He asks God if He would destroy the whole region because the sins of only some. He begs God to spare them if He could find 50 “righteous” men there. God consents. Then Abraham brings the number down and down: 50 becomes 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, then 10. If TEN men can be found who have not totally rejected God and His Law, then the Lord says He will spare the whole area. Ten people. Now, that should not have been too hard, right? After all, remember Lot lived there. And his wife and daughters. And his servants. Surely there must be at least ten believers in all of them! But, sadly, there was not. That may be the saddest commentary on Lot’s decision — he had lived there in Sodom, amongst those people, for quite a while and yet not only had he failed to convert any of them, but they had apparently converted (or perverted) almost all of Lot’s household.

So the Lord sends two angels to carry out the horrendous decree. They go to Sodom, where Lot takes them into his home. But immediately the men of Sodom surround the house and demand that Lot turn over to them — and their wicked, murderous passions — the two visitors. Lot refuses. The men of Sodom storm the house and try to take it by force. But, of course, it is God they are dealing with here and so they are unsuccessful — God strikes them blind and Lot, his wife and daughters, and the two angelic visitors escape. The angels tell Lot to flee the area. That God will rain down fire and brimstone from heaven and burn the cities like hell itself. Run, they say, but do NOT look back.

You know what happened. Lot, his wife, and daughters do as the angels bid. Leaving everything behind — all his wealth, his flocks and herds, his house and possessions, his servants and herdsmen —

they make for the hills. But Lot's wife (for whatever reason) turns back to look. Did she want one last look at what she was about to lose? Did she want to see if they were being chased? Did she want to watch the destruction? We do not know. But because she turned and looked, rather than going forward as told, she was turned into a pillar of salt. And so, Lot lost her too.

And Sodom and Gomorrah and the rest of the cities and peoples of the plain? Well, just as God said, they were totally wiped out. Fire rained down from heaven, so hot that it melted the very rocks and stones. So complete that absolutely nothing was left for miles. Just scorched, blackened, ruined earth. From which the land never did recover. Never again was it lush and green and fertile. Never again was it well-watered and beautiful. Never again was it populous and mighty and rich. It was dead and deserted. (pause)

So, what does all this mean for us today? How might we connect this with Reformation Sunday and LWML Sunday?

Well, let's start with Lot. We talked a bit about him and his foolish choice already a few weeks back. But let's review. Lot was a believer; in the New Testament he is called a "righteous" man, meaning he trusted in the promise of a Savior from sin. A Savior who would come from Abraham's line, as promised by God. Lot's faith and salvation, then, are not to be doubted. And yet, he allowed the temptations of this world — its wealth and riches, its beauties and siren-songs — to influence his decisions and life. He wanted to have a foot in both camps — that of God AND that of this world. But, as Jesus says, no man can serve two masters. Either he will love the one and hate the other, or he will hate the one and love the other. That is, this Bible story is a lesson to us as to the cost of discipleship. We dare not let anything come between us and God. Not even the good things of this world and life. For those things are only temporary and fleeting. Sooner or later they will be gone.

Now, let's turn to Abraham. In him we certainly have a picture of that coming Savior. Remember how Abraham fought for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah — even though they were wicked, horrible, damnable sinners. Well, that is Christ, isn't it? He has fought for us. He has taken our part, even though we too are wicked, horrible, damnable sinners. He came down from heaven to fight that most powerful and mighty of tyrants — the devil himself. Jesus fights the devil and He wins. He withstands all the temptations of the Wicked One — not just in those 40 days in the wilderness, but day after day, throughout His life. He keeps the commandments perfectly — loving God and man, even at the cost of sacrificing Himself. He carries our burden of sin to the cross and pays the full price — the total hell, the fire and brimstone of God's wrath at OUR sin. What should wipe us off the face of the earth instead lands on Him. He suffers, He is cursed, He is rejected, He is abandoned, He dies. And in that He wins the victory. For us. To set us free.

But, because He is God, Christ cannot stay dead. No, He rises again on the third day to show His victory, His freeing of the captives, His restoring us to life again. True and eternal life. Life as God's children and heirs. Life in the true Promised Land, the new heaven and earth He promises. All of your sin has been settled at the cross. Your forgiveness won. And He makes it yours as the Gospel is applied to you, in Word and Sacrament. In the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. In baptism and absolution and the Lord's Supper. In these Means of Grace, YOU are set free and made one with Him. One, to live forever!

And yet the sad truth is, like Lot or the people of Sodom, we still stumble. We sin every day. Sometimes we take the Gospel for granted, maybe even reject that gracious and life-giving gift. But our Lord does NOT give up on us! No, He pleads for us just as Abraham pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah. Every day our Lord Christ stands at His Father's throne, showing Him those hands and feet nailed to the cross for our forgiveness, the head crowned with thorns to make us kings, the side pierced by the

soldier's spear from which came out blood and water. Those wounds, that blood and water (which symbolize the Lord's Supper and baptism) HAVE paid for all our sin. Even the sins of which we are guilty today. There is NO sin too big. There is NO sinner too far gone. No, Christ has paid the price for all. And He constantly pleads for us and our salvation.

And it is that Gospel to which we flee. Like Lot running for the hills, so we find our only refuge and hope in Christ. He shelters us. He provides for us. He saves us. He calls us back to Him. Day after day after day. (pause)

All right then. So, how might we connect this all to Reformation and LWML Sunday? Simply put, that Gospel is what the Reformation is all about. Luther and the rest wanted everyone to know that Gospel, that Good News of forgiveness for poor miserable sinners who deserve destruction no less than those people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their sin is no greater than ours. And yet it is ALL washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. God has done everything for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And He gives it to us as the Holy Spirit calls/gathers/enlightens/sanctifies/keeps us in that faith as the Gospel comes to us in that Word and those sacraments. And that too is the aim and goal and mission of our LWML — to bring that saving Gospel to a world lost without it.

So, today we thank God for the Reformation and the reformers, we thank God for the LWML and its faithful women. But we especially thank God for our Savior, Jesus Christ. For He has delivered us from our sin. And for THAT we sing His praises, now and forever. Amen.

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

We stand and join in reciting the LWML League Pledge, as printed in your order of service....