

## Serve the LORD with All Your Heart

† Do not be afraid or turn away. (vv.20-22)

† See what great things God has done for you! (vv.23-24)

In the name of Jesus, who shows us the heart of God, dearly redeemed family, loved by God:

We've all known them and sometimes maybe even feel like them. People turn away from God. Some do so consciously like a neighbor at our cold Saturday car wash for Campus Ministry. He liked that it was free. He also enjoyed telling us loudly why he and his wife chose to raise their kids without God. He felt they were all just fine as secular humanists. There are hard hearts and then there are cold hearts where their faith is dying like an ember on a stone cold driveway. They still consider themselves Christians, but don't hear Christ saying, "Whoever is of God hears God's Word." He told His fellow Jews, "You therefore hear them not because you are not of God." (John 8:47) This is the time when Jesus warned, "***The love of most will grow cold.***" (Matthew 24:12) So Jesus lights the fire with God's Word and sacrament. His kindness brings us to His house again today. He welcomes us into His heart in order to win ours. God-powered love makes you **STRONG to Serve the LORD with All Your Heart.**

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Back in the day when our kids were in Sunday School, one of their teachers shared something interesting. She had explained how the Israelites conquered the Promised Land under Joshua, Moses' successor. For about 200 years, ruled by Judges, they were on a rollercoaster. Whenever God blessed them, they forgot God and worshiped idols. Then He would discipline them until they cried out for help. When they repented, God raised up another Judge. But as soon as He helped them, Israel returned to idolatry. After several times of this our kids said, "Not again! What's wrong with those people?" And their Sunday School teacher replied, "That's you. That's me. That's all of us the way we treat God."

Samuel, the last of the Judges, had to put up with this all his life. His mother Hannah gave him to the LORD for old Eli the priest to raise. Samuel served the LORD, but when he installed his two sons as Judges, they were corrupt. Neighbors attacked Israel, and the people decided they wanted a king. Samuel must have felt kicked in the stomach, but mostly he was concerned that Israel was rejecting God again.

Samuel prayed, and the LORD said he was right. They were rejecting God. Samuel should give them a king, but warn what he would do. The king would take their sons for his army, their daughters for his palace, their land for his officials and taxes from their farms, flocks and herds. Didn't matter. A king they wanted, a king they got, tall, strong Saul to fight their battles and win their wars – at least at first.

Don't we all assume if things are going well, God must be pleased with us? Like our car wash man, who feels the need for God with low gas prices, full grocery shelves, jobs, victories, championships, good health and wealth? Pride settles thick like flies on a sweet roll left out in the blazing sun.

God loves us too much to let us fall away. He enabled Samuel to call down a storm during the dry harvest season when it normally never rains. Samuel told the Israelites to brace themselves. "***I will call upon the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.***" Children's lessons in those days could be quite impressive!

God got through. He gave the people repentant hearts to plead with Samuel for God's mercy and forgiveness. That's all God wants. Not sacrifice or money, "***The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.***" (Psalm 51:17 NIV84) Once we realize our sin,

<sup>1</sup> "STRONG to serve" ministry initiative of Saint Croix Lutheran High School – Sunday 2 of 4 at New Life.

God's love takes our fear away. ***“Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.”***

See, there is no substitute for God. Whether it's the “Roaring Twenties” or our own 1990's when some economists predicted the Stock Market could never crash, God will not let prosperity take His place. He is a jealous God who allows no substitutes. Money can't guard itself any better than an idol can see with its stone cold eyes or hear with its chiseled ears. It can't even stand up by itself. God knows there is no life without Him, so He sent His Son Jesus to give us life to the full. Jesus came down to rescue us and call us back to His side. He soothes our hearts with His all-forgiving love. God wants us to know that His anger is past. Christ has reconciled us to God. **Do not be afraid or turn away.**

### **† See what great things God has done for you! (vv.23-24)**

First, think about this. All this was God's choice. God chose to make us His own by putting His Name on us in Baptism. His choice, His good pleasure. Since He brought it about in the first place, He's determined to carry His work in your heart through to completion. As Samuel put it, ***“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you.”*** When you feel weak and troubled in your heart, remember that your Pastor is praying for you. So are Christians everywhere when we say, “Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” And while pastors and Christians are praying for God's blessings on your heart, Jesus Himself and the Holy Spirit intercedes for you ***“with groans that words cannot express.”*** (Romans 8:26) Along with God's choice and our prayers, we have God's record to lean on. This is Christian education at its best when Samuel said, ***“I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.”*** Don't give up on God. He surely has not given up on you! His powerful works in the past will bring you to glory eternal.

You see, the Lord has had you on His heart from all eternity. He who is infinite in knowledge is also boundless in love and compassion. He cares about you as if you were His only care. He thinks about you as His very own. His heart is always yearning for your comfort and your peace because you are the love of His life. He gave His life for you on the cross. He restored new life for you by rising again. His compassions for you are new every morning. His faithfulness never fails. It reaches to the skies.

He who gives you His heart day by day wants your heart too. He wants you to give your heart to God in care for others. He is the father to the fatherless, the husband of widows, the comforter of the forsaken and distressed. God lifts you up to bestow His tender loving care on others. You are His heart.

Where is a heart that needs your care? Where is a lonely soul that needs you coming in because everyone else is going out? Is there some tenderness of God that you can tender for the forsaken and distressed? The way God works, the more love you pour out God's love for others the more God fills your heart to overflowing with His love treasures for you. His heart is infinite. Give Him your heart, for there is no end to the blessings He can bring when He makes your heart His home.

When God takes our fear away, He turns us back to Him in humble awe and respect. When we **See what great things God has done** for us, our hearts fill with gratitude. We want to keep adding to our faith: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. Increasing in these keeps us ***“from being ineffective and unproductive in [our] knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (2 Peter 1:5-9) That's all this ministry initiative is about for Saint Croix. Gratitude to God and hope for others to grow up in His Word. From Israel to the world, from the cross to the crown – **Serve the LORD with All Your Heart.** Amen.