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Hebrews 12:1-13
August 14, 2022
Pentecost 10

GOD DISCIPLINES THOSE HE LOVES

Please pull out the blue hymnal and, if you would, please open to page 291. This part of the hymnal is Luther's Small Catechism and we are looking at the section of the catechism that explains Baptism. Luther's Small Catechism is important to us because the document is one of our six Lutheran creeds. It was adopted as such by the early Lutherans because it so clearly, accurately and succinctly summarizes what the Bible says. The catechism has been used for some 500 years primarily for teaching children.

Please look at the bottom of the page where it says, "The Meaning of Baptism for Our Daily Life." I'll read and you can follow along.

Fourth: What does baptizing with water mean? Baptism means that the old Adam in us (The old Adam is another name for the natural self that we were each born with.) ...the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Notice, there are two things that are to happen in a Baptized believer each day: 1) Death and 2) Resurrection. I'd like you to keep that in mind, just that starkly: death and resurrection. Those are the two things God intends for you as a baptized believer each day. Jesus said, *Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it cannot spring up again.*

You may close your hymnals now.

I wanted to show you this because the portion of God's Word we are meditating on today from Hebrews chapter 12 is so prone to Christianity clichés, things that sound Christian and pious but sort of miss the mark. Hebrews chapter 12 proclaims the important truth that God disciplines those He loves. God disciplines those He loves. Some take that to mean that He molds and shapes you. Or He "tests" you (whatever that means). Some will say that He purges and cleanses you. Some say that He teaches you a lesson through hard times.

What God really has in mind when He disciplines you is to kill you – that is, to put to death your natural self. He refuses to work with the raw materials. Instead, He intends to re-create you. You must die so that you can come back to life again totally new. Not someday, but today, every day.

Christian apologist C.S. Lewis explained it this way: *Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work; I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked - the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself, my own will shall become yours.*

Incidentally, this also provides an important answer as to why God permits suffering in the lives of His believers. It is no fun for my will, what I want, to be stymied and then replaced with someone else's will, namely His.

What makes it even harder is that God usually imposes His will on us through other people – through the police officer, through the school teacher, through the doctor, through the pastor, through your wife. We don't see God, we see this unreasonable person and acquiescing to their “nonsense” is so much more a bitter pill to swallow.

The Christians to whom the book of Hebrews was originally addressed were suffering persecution for their Christian faith. Talk about a cancel culture – their property was being confiscated, they were being arrested and thrown in jail, they were being harassed and intimidated in the public square – and the Christians were supposed to look on these bloodthirsty heathens and see God? They were to submit and accept it as God's will over their own?

Yes! This is how God causes us to die to ourselves and live for Him. But know this most of all, God is doing it NOT to be cruel or heartless. It is because He loves you, loves you like a father, loves you way too much to let you have your way and frolic carefree on your way to hell. You could let your toddler have their way and go anywhere they want – but that strategy doesn't go so well next to a busy street. In fact, when you suffer, any time you don't get your way, take it as proof of God's love for you, evidence that He has redeemed you to Himself. Listen again to Hebrews chapter twelve:

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood in your fight against sin. Have you also forgotten the encouragement that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard the Lord's discipline lightly, and do not become weary of his correction. For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and he corrects every son he accepts. Endure suffering as discipline. God is dealing with you as sons. Is there a son whose father does not discipline him? If you are not disciplined (and all of us have received it), then you are illegitimate children and not sons. In addition, we have earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. Should we not submit even more to the Father of the spirits and live? They disciplined us for a little while, according to what seemed best to them, but God disciplines us for our good, so that we may have a share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant when it is happening, but painful, yet later it yields a peaceful harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.

Notice it doesn't say God punishes you. It says God disciplines you. God punished Jesus on the cross so that He will not punish you. It says God disciplines you so that you can have life, so that you can share in His holiness and so that you will yield a harvest of righteousness as a result. Or as another place in the Bible puts it, that you may *be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.*

But it doesn't feel glorious, does it? When I am stymied, crushed or grieved, I don't feel strong at all. I find myself praying like the psalm, *Remember that I am only dust.* How am I supposed to rise up again the next day? How am I supposed to rebound and come back new and better? I'm not so resilient.

The answer is that God doesn't leave it to you to raise yourself to new life. The answer is your Baptism. The answer is Jesus. This is far more intimate than the "Footprints in the Sand" motif. When you were baptized you were intimately intertwined with Jesus. His death became your death, which you die every day. But in Baptism His resurrection also became your resurrection so that you are raised to life by the Holy Spirit every day. Therefore Hebrews chapter 12 urges us:

Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal. In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God's throne. Carefully consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinful people, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart.

As you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, you'll find a miraculous thing happening. In spite of the hard hand of the Lord's discipline, you find yourself still looking to Him for forgiveness, still trusting in Him for salvation, still turning to Him for grace and mercy, still pleading for His guidance to navigate the next day. You see, it happened! Your will has been made new. It is the same as His will. The Holy Spirit has done it. You have been raised to life. You have been raised to life – a life you will live to eternity.

God disciplines those He loves. The stark reality of this truth does not sell well in the superficial world of pop-Christianity. But by His discipline we are brought closer to our Father, we become like our Father and one day we will be raised like Christ to meet our Father.