



October 8, 2017

FAITH GROWS WHEN IT'S WRITTEN ON OUR HEARTS
Pastor Vern Christopherson and Pastor Shelley Cunningham

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9 NRSV

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, ²so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. ³Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

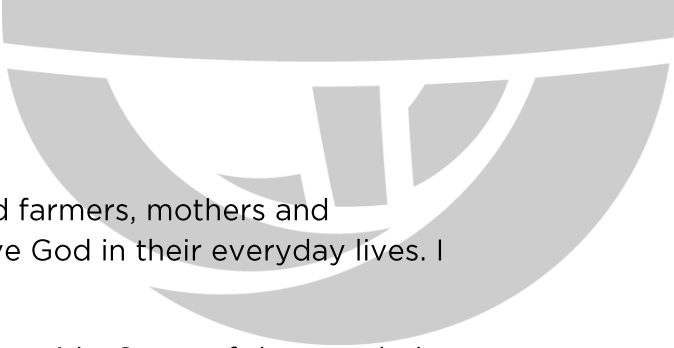
(Martin and Katie Luther enter from an evening stroll)

Martin: Oh Kitty, my rib, that was another fine meal. Boiled potatoes and cabbage. Roast pork ... my favorite. You take such good care of me.

Katie: And a nice quiet walk after dinner. I do so love our community here at Wittenberg. We have a fine life here, Martin.

M: We certainly do. It's hard to believe where God has taken us. Me, a former monk. You, a former nun. Yet here we are, serving God in a new way.

K: Wasn't that one of the ideas that raised the ire of the church in Rome? That it was possible to serve God just as faithfully outside of the church as within?



M: Yes, it was. I came to believe that shoemakers and farmers, mothers and fathers, citizens and taxpayers had the ability to serve God in their everyday lives. I referred to this opportunity as a person's *vocation*.

K: I remember. Your writings spread across the countryside. Some of them ended up at my convent. When the other nuns and I first read them, we were shocked. Could God really see the office of wife, mother, homemaker as just as much of a calling as our religious order?

M: That's exactly what I meant. Callings aren't limited to the clergy. We all have a responsibility to serve God wherever we are.

K: I was captivated by this idea. I had lived in the convent since I was 10 years old; I took my vows to be a nun at age 16. It was all I knew. We nuns believed we were serving God in the holiest way. But what if there was another way to live out God's mission in the world?

Some of the other nuns were interested too. The only problem was, we couldn't imagine life beyond the convent. We were all in our mid-20s. If we broke our vows, we would bring shame on our families. We'd be on our own - too old to marry, unable to work to support ourselves. And how would we even get out of the convent?

That's when I wrote to you for help.

M: I remember. You were quite persuasive, my dear. You asked me to help you find a way out of the convent and into a new life. I'll admit, your letter took me aback. I was a theologian, not a matchmaker. And I had no idea how to rescue you. Tell me again the story of that fateful day. I so love hearing it.

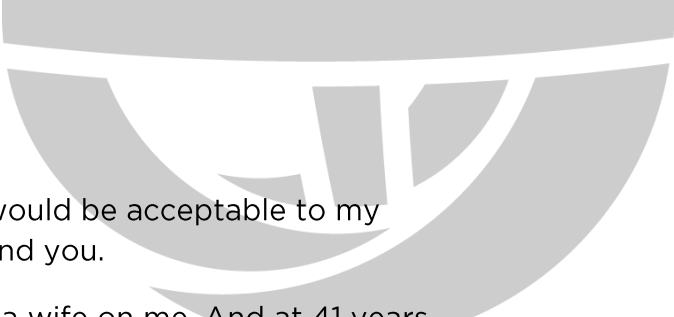
K: Your friend, the fishmonger, came to the rescue. He regularly delivered barrels of pickled herring to the convent. One night after he made his delivery, eight of my sisters and I hid inside those barrels, and he loaded them into his wagon and wheeled us to freedom. We stunk to high heaven, but we were out.

M: That was quite the escape. And imagine my surprise when my fishmonger-friend delivered those nine sisters on my doorstep. Now what? I did manage to find husbands for eight of them. But you. You were a bit of a ... challenge.

K: You certainly tried your best to marry me off. That nobleman with the double chin ... the young farmer who was scared of his own shadow ... then that ghastly Dr. Glatz, who was old enough to be my grandfather.

M: And you said no to every last one. Why must you be so difficult sometimes?





K: I have standards. There were only two men I felt would be acceptable to my temperament: your friend Nicholas von Amsdorf ... and you.

M: Well ... I had always said no one was going to put a wife on me. And at 41 years of age, I wasn't looking to change my ways. But your suggestion stirred something in me as well. Perhaps I, too, could expand my vocation and serve God in the midst of a family. And certainly you would make things interesting ... with your quick wit and keen intellect.

K: You flatter me.

M: Well, it wasn't a marriage for love ... at least not at first. I was thinking practically.

K: For once.

M: And it was an excellent decision. You have made for a very good wife. And it wasn't long before our family began to grow. First Hans was born; we named him after my father.

K: Then Elizabeth, Magdalena, Martin, Paul, Margarethe ... six fine children we had. We have experienced such joy through them. Though we certainly shared the pain, too, as baby Elizabeth and little Magdalena both died.

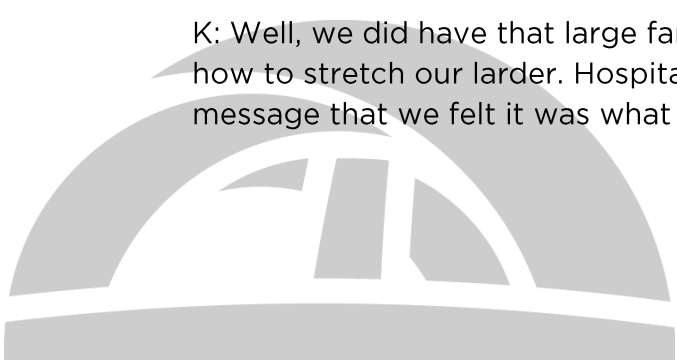
M: I began to realize the incredible responsibility we parents have, the incredible opportunity to shape the lives of our children. We need to teach them the faith.

K: But it wasn't just our children whose lives you touched, dear. You wrote the Catechism so other parents teach their children too. Those little tracts about the meaning of the Apostles' Creed, the 10 Commandments, the Lord's Prayer were very helpful.

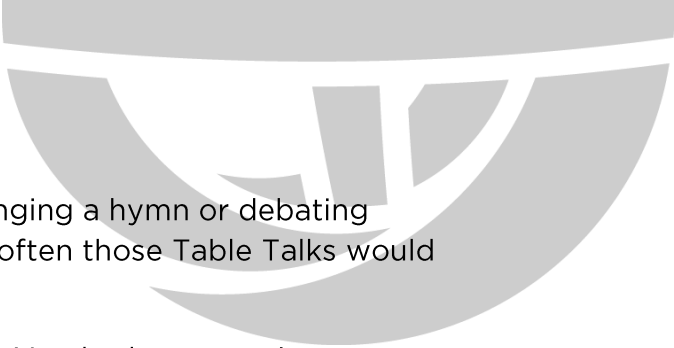
M: And of course, there were other children who ended up living with us, the orphans you took in and cared for as your own.

K: Who could turn away a child in need? It was our Christian duty to welcome them to our table.

M: Who could turn away anyone? Not you. How did you do it? On top of our family and all those orphans, you provided lodging for exiled clergymen, escaped nuns, government officials, and many, many students. Our table was always full ... and the amazing thing was, we never wanted for anything.



K: Well, we did have that large family garden. And I learned a trick or two about how to stretch our larder. Hospitality was such an important part of Christ's message that we felt it was what we were called to do. Besides, you were in your



best form sitting at our table, a beer in your hand, singing a hymn or debating theology with our guests. Don't you remember how often those Table Talks would go late into the night?

M: How could I forget? But this wasn't just about me. You had a reputation as one of Wittenberg's best beer-makers.

K: And you one of Wittenberg's best beer-drinkers.

M: Guilty as charged. At last, something I could feel guilty about that didn't send me into a fit of despair.

K: I must say, you were definitely better at drinking beer than you were at managing our finances. I had to handle the money in our house. If it hadn't been for me you'd have been relying on the charity of others. Remember the time you wanted to give away that valuable vase, but then you couldn't find it? I have a confession to make ... I hid it from you.

M: Katie, no.

K: Yes, it's true. You were generous to a fault.

M: Still, you have to admit, the Lord always did provide.

K: And I like to think we have been good stewards of those gifts. After all, we used our money not to buy the pope's indulgences for forgiveness, but to give to the Wittenberg community chest to take care of the needs of our neighbors who didn't have enough food to eat or clothes to wear.

M: If we call ourselves Christian, then we ought to be little Christs to one another. Scripture is clear: We are to love our neighbors as Christ first loved us.

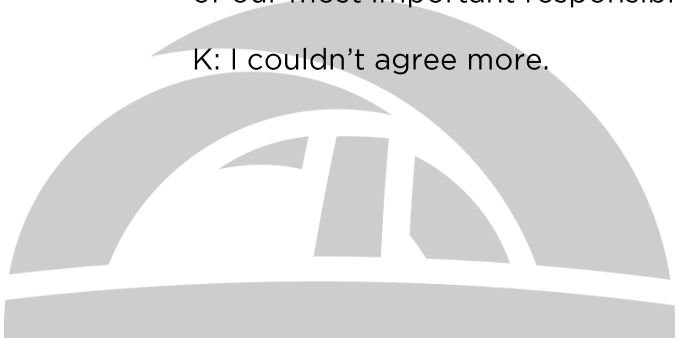
K: Careful, dear. You've slipped into preaching mode again.


M: It's an occupational hazard, I guess. You've got me in a reflective mood. These are challenging times. The future is not always clear. There have been reformers in the church who have died for their faith. And who knows? I could be next.

K: I don't want to believe that, but I suppose it's true.

M: Yet somehow God has provided for me and protected me. I have been able to experience things I never dreamed of: to be a husband and father, to provide for our family, to watch our children grow. As I see it, passing on faith to them is one of our most important responsibilities.

K: I couldn't agree more.





M: I know that putting my trust in God gives me strength and comfort in challenging times. And I know that the little everyday ways we practice our faith...

K: ... the catechism we recite at the dinner table ...

M: ... the bedtime and morning prayers we do ...

K: ... when we share what we have with others ...

M: These things set an example for our children. And they keep God close to our hearts.

I believe faith grows when it's written on our hearts. And someday, when I am not here - or you either, Katie - I want our children to know the love of Jesus. I want their hearts to belong to him.

Christ's love has sustained me. And I pray it will sustain them too.



