

Like a Mighty River Flowing

Words by Michael Perry (1942-1996)

Words are in print copy.

Old Orchard Church
August 12, 2012— 10:15 to 11:50 a.m.

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

Credits

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**For Christ is the end of the law
for righteousness
to everyone who believes.**

— Romans 10:4 —

Celebrating Jesus as Fulfiller of God's Covenant with Moses: Christ, the End of the Law

Praise Him who gave the law to restrain evil in the world.

Praise Him who gave the law to slay our self-righteousness,
to show us our sin and our need for a Savior.

Praise Him who gave the law
as a sure guide for our moral sanity.



— Scripture Readings —

Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 5:28-33

New Testament Lesson: Matthew 5:17-20

— Sermon —

"What's in a Name?"

Ephesians 3:14-15

Mark Robertson, Director of Ministry to Youth and Families

The Two Hats of the Law of God

One of the great defenders of Christianity in the 20th century, C.S. Lewis, once remarked that the Christian faith had to be true because no one would invent a religion so difficult to keep straight.

A good example of the difficulty, often taking the form of paradoxes, is the Bible's view of the law of God. On the one hand, it teaches (for instance, in Psalm 119) that the law is delicious, like a sweet pie after a good meal. But then it also says that the law is our executioner and puts us to death without so much as a shred of mercy. Say what? If it's good, how can it kill us? If it kills us, how can we possibly call it good?

The reason for the paradox has to do with what the law is and what I am as a son of Adam, or what you are as a daughter of Eve. In itself, the law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, is pure and unadulterated goodness because it comes from God and embodies his character. If you're pondering the right way to live, the law's the answer. Then, indeed, it will be sweet like dessert because it's God's road map to reality. Do you want to know what makes for strong, trusting relationships with people you know? Don't steal from them, don't talk them down or distort the truth about them behind their back, and don't feverishly desire what they have. In other words, keep the 8th, 9th and 10th commandments. As Paul puts it in Romans 7, the law is **holy, just, and good**. A thing doesn't get much better than that.

So what's the problem? We are. When the law with its demands of absolute goodness meets us, it meets spiritual impoverishment. In terms of moral power, it's *Batman Meets the Ant*. And the law has no capacity for mercy either: goodness is what it is, whether we can do what it requires or not. And we can't. That's why, as pure demand, the law is our executioner. **The letter** [of the law] **kills**, Paul wrote. Or, more radical still, as he put it in 1 Corinthians 15, **the power of sin is the law**.

All this explains why we need to be rescued from pure goodness, from the law. That's what Christ came to do. He endured the relentless hostility of the law against sinners so that we'd no longer have to be terrified by its demands. Having absorbed the toxic bitterness of the law in his own body at the cross, Jesus has turned the law into honey-sweetness for us.

Are you tasting the bittersweetness of the law these days? Do you flinch from facing it as your executioner? If you do, the power of the gospel will be thwarted in your life. God wills that every day I should hear the death sentence of the law pronounced against my self-centered heart and behavior.

But since I already died to its demands when Jesus died, I need not be terrified by "the law's loud thunder." Instead, with gratitude in my heart toward my sin-bearing Savior, I can take up the commandments again as the wonderful road map to the Good Life given us by our heavenly Father.

Who would have invented a religion so paradoxical?

—Ron Lutjens