

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, September 24, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“The Cattle on a Thousand Hills”

READING: Psalm 50:7-15 – “Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens. For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to drive out into the countryside around Corydon. As I was driving I saw a bunch of black angus cattle grazing on a hillside, and immediately Psalm 50 came to mind. It does so most every time I see a bunch of cattle on an Indiana hillside. God’s words to his people Israel continue to ring true for his people in our day and age as well.

The Israelites in the days of the kings and prophets were very good about observing the sacrificial laws. At the appointed feasts they brought their animals to be sacrificed. They gave to the priesthood the required portions. They were fine with the fat parts being burned in the fire for God. And then they were able to feast on what remained. Everyone enjoys a good barbeque, right?

The problem was not with their sacrifices. The problem was with their hearts. Their hearts were often far from the Lord their God. They went through the motions. They kept the outward law, but often inwardly they were doubtful, faithless, or even worse, in thrall with the pagan gods of their neighbors and enemies. When God testifies against them, he does not fault them for their sacrifices, but he makes it clear to Israel that he does not NEED those sacrifices. The pagan religions believed that their gods NEEDED to eat, drink, and function much as human beings do. Yahweh makes very clear to them that IF he was hungry, he had all the animals of the world to choose from. But he is not in NEED of any of them. But he does have a desire: to be loved, worshipped, and obeyed by his people.

This passage is not the only one in Scripture where God chastises Israel for their empty sacrifices. In I Samuel 15, Samuel takes Saul to task when the King failed to follow God’s directive to destroy ALL the animals of the Amalekites, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.” God was looking at Saul’s heart, not at Saul’s sacrificial fires. He found no real love or faith in that heart and rejected Saul as king.

In Psalm 50 the psalmist warns Israel, and King David, that God is looking for more than outward signs. He seeks an inward reliance on God’s goodness and a trust of his true intentions. He seeks faith. To this very day this is still the case. God does not NEED our worship. He does not NEED our prayers. He does not NEED our offerings. He does not NEED our good works. If any of these are offered out of “have to” or from fear or in the hope this will bring the giver good fortune, then God finds them distasteful and unacceptable. Going through the motions without an inward need and desire for God’s presence is just so much noise.

We have a God who knows us through and through. We have a God who loves us with a deep and undivided passion. Loved us so much that he sent his Son into the world to suffer and become THE atoning sacrifice for all our sins. That Son loved us so much that he bore our sins AND our punishment on that cross

so that we could know, trust, and love God with all our hearts, minds, and souls. That's what God wants. He wants our faith in him. He wants our love for him. He wants us to want a real relationship with him.

So, when you see some nice fat angus cattle on a southern Indiana hill, let them recall for you God's words, "The cattle on a thousand hills are mine" – and he doesn't NEED a single one of them. What God desires is your heart – all of it, given to him out of love, devotion, thanksgiving, and trust. That pleases him more than the fragrance of the sacrifices. He wants you to be his child forever. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) **MARY MILLER CRUISE** through the Locks is set for October 19. Interest was such that the bus filled immediately. We are also taking the van, so a few seats might still be available. The cost of the cruise is \$38 per person. If you are signed up, please send or bring a check made out to "Grace Lutheran Church" to the office or in an envelope in the offering plate.
- 2) I and some 44 other folks, most of them from Grace, will be leaving at 8:00 A.M. on Sunday for our bus tour to Frankenmuth, MI. Keep all of us and our bus driver in your prayers. We'll be back on October 2.