

The Little Red Car Is in the Lane

1Peter 4:7-11

The Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 13, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

When I was young for a period of time my mother sold Avon. She was an Avon lady. She did pretty well. They made her a group sales leader for a while.

My father got her a Ford Fiesta to drive when she sold Avon. I do not know what Ford Fiestas are like now, but when I was child we learned that Ford Fiestas had German racing car engines in them and that in order for them to stay in good condition they needed to be operated at above average speeds. My mother kept that engine in peak condition.

For several summers in my childhood, my mother would leave my sister and myself at home by ourselves while she went out and sold Avon. We did not know how long she would be gone. We knew that she would be home by supper time, but we did not know if she would come home closer to 6pm or closer to 3pm. It depended on how many of her customers were at home and how much they wanted to visit and to buy.

While Mom was away my sister and I played all kinds of fun games. We would beat each other with the cushions and pillows off of the couch and other furniture. We would throw a bouncy rubber ball against the wall trying unsuccessfully to miss the oil painting hanging on the wall. When the bouncy rubber ball hit the floor we would wrestle each other to see who got the privilege of throwing the ball the next time. We would hit balloons and balls across the living room to each other trying to keep them from hitting the floor like in volleyball. Furniture did suffer under this kind of use.

The whole time we were doing this we kept an eye out the window to see if the little red car was in the lane. If the little red car was in the lane we knew how many minutes it would take for Mom to park the car in the unattached garage, get all of her Avon stuff together and walk up the sidewalk to the house. When we were not checking the windows to see if she were coming we were always listening for the car door to shut indicating that she had come home.

When we did hear the car door close or see the little red car in the lane, we would quickly put all of the furniture back where it went, hide anything that was broken, turn on the TV set, and pretend like we had been watching television the whole time that she was gone.

It was amazing how different our behavior was when we knew that she would be coming through the door at any moment. It was amazing how different our behavior was when we thought we had plenty of time before she would come home.

How different our behavior is because we do not believe the first line of the epistle reading. We do not believe that the end of all things has come near. If we believed that we would pray and love differently than we do.

Our Lord has taken two thousand years and He still has not returned in glory like He promised. He has taken so long to return that the scoffers are out there scoffing. They say that He is never going to return. If He were going to have returned, He'd have done it already, they think.

While we do not scoff, we also do not believe. If we believed that the judge was actually at the gate and the little red car was in the lane spiritually speaking, then we would be living a lot differently.

An employee who believes that he is not under review lives and works a lot differently from the employee who does not believe that he is under review. An employee who does not believe that he is under an annual review is more prone to be lackadaisical in his work. He does shoddy work. He might

take periods of time where he does not work. He will not do his best working. He will do a few things and consider that sufficient for the day. He will still expect his paycheck at the end of the month. He does not take his work seriously. He is not of sound mind. He is not sober minded.

An employee who knows that he is up for annual review behaves differently. He knows that at the end of the year his employer or supervisor will evaluate his performance. He knows that if he is building something the building or product had better be of good quality produced in a timely fashion. He cannot be too late, but he also cannot be shoddy. He is therefore of sober mind when he does his work. He takes his work seriously. He does not want to lose the paycheck at the end of the month and he knows that if he has produced shoddy work, he might. The supervisor or the employer expects results. They expect a good return on the investment that they have made in their employee. He therefore is sober minded. He is serious. He is of sound judgment when he goes about his daily tasks. They need to be done right.

A farmer is under annual review all of the time. Here I am not talking about the factors that are beyond the farmer's control for which the farmers of this congregation come often to Divine Service to thank God for the yield that He granted. I am talking about the things that are under the farmer's control. If he fails to do those things, it will show in his yield. If he fails to adjust his techniques with changes around him the market will leave him behind. He must keep up with the times in order to do what he does. And the yield is the yield. If laziness has crept in or failure in some fashion has occurred, the yield will reveal it at the end of the year. And then how will the farmer finance his operation?

Satan has taken advantage of the fact that our Lord has waited two thousand years to return in glory for judgment. Our Lord has delayed for so long in order to give everyone ample opportunity for repentance. God is not slow as some understand slowness. He is patient with us so that we may enter into repentance.

In order to understand our Lord's seeming delay it is necessary to heed the words of this same apostle in his second epistle, "With the Lord a thousand years is as a day and a day as a thousand years." If that is the case, then the Lord has only been gone two days. If He comes tomorrow He will still fulfill His words, "I am coming soon." If He waits another thousands years, then for Him it will have been only three days and He will still have fulfilled His words, "I am coming soon." That means that it is just as possible that He will come tomorrow as it is that He will come in another thousand or even ten thousand years. We do not know the day and the hour of His coming. And that is the point of not knowing the day and the hour of His coming. The point is that we are always ready because it could be tomorrow. You are under review by the supervisor. The harvest is coming and the yield will show what the farmer did or failed to do.

Therefore in view of the fact that you are under review be of sound mind. Be sober minded. Be of sound mind and be sober minded in regards to your prayers. Do not pray frivolously. Do not think while you are praying that your prayer is of no use or of no avail. Do not think that your prayers are something that you do for God and then everything is all still dependent upon you. Do not heap up empty phrases when you pray. When our Lord exhorts us not to heap up empty phrases, He is not saying that repetitive prayer in and of itself is bad. There are times when a prayer needs to be repeated. In fact our Lord Himself told us that when we pray we ought to say, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,..." and all of the rest. All of our prayers are to match the great prayer that He gave. Such prayers will become repetitive. We will ask for some of the same things over and over again. There are days when I pray the Lord's Prayer several times a day in addition to the times when I say it in keeping with my pastoral duties. It is simply a good prayer that covers all things that need to be covered. There is nothing

wrong with saying it more than once. When our Lord talks about heaping up empty phrases He is talking about the way that the Gentiles of His own day and age prayed to their idols. The Gentiles of our Lord's day and age would pray to their idols elaborate and long prayers, prayers that took a long time to say, thinking that they would be heard better if only they said more. In many of the Gentile worship services to Zeus or whoever, if the Gentile messed the prayer up by misspeaking a word, he was required by his idol to start the prayer all over again and say it right no matter how much of the prayer he had already said. This is what the Lord is forbidding when He talks about heaping up empty phrases. He is talking about people who do not pray with a sober mind knowing that they are under review of the judge. Such people honestly believe that their performance in prayer is what counts when they are praying. They are not sober minded about their prayers realizing that but for the grace of God they could not pray. They are not of sound mind when they pray because they think that saying the right words to God and saying it in the right way with the right heart is what moves God to answer, but that makes God into little more than a Harry Potter magic trick whose magic does not work unless the wand is flourished correctly and the words pronounced distinctly.

Praying soberly and with a sound mind involves the serious reality that you are speaking to the Creator of all. He is the all powerful. He is the all holy. Ignoring that reality and treating God as merely your buddy or your friend when you pray is not praying soberly with a sound mind. God is also the all gracious and the heavenly Father who eagerly wishes to hear our prayers. Without taking this seriously we would hardly pray at all fearing His wrath against our sins. So sober minded prayer and prayer with a sound mind is prayer rightly acknowledging at the same time God's holiness and His graciousness, that God is the all powerful and yet God will listen. It does not try to manipulate God or treat Him like a vending machine or a magical incantation. It acknowledges that God is His own person with a will and a mind that is far above ours. It is prayer that acknowledges that the person praying is under review by the judge and the judge is standing at the gate. The little red car is in the lane.

As is our prayers so also is our love. Love is to be earnest. Love is not to be a sham or a pretend love. Love is not to be wishful thinking. Love is not to be based upon feelings but rather on results. This means that love cannot afford to ignore that it is under review by the judge of all. Do your crop yields care about how confident you were when you planted? No. Your confidence may have been misplaced. Does your supervisor care about the confidence with which you perform your tasks. No. He cares about the competency with which the task is done, both its timeliness and its completeness. I have met people who were confident that they did their job correctly who still got fired. It was all wishful thinking. And I know people who perform their tasks convinced they will be fired at any moment because of their ineptness who work and please the manager for an entire lifetime.

When I was in college competition with Japan over education performance was a matter of concern here in America. Studies had shown that Japanese students were down on themselves about their abilities in mathematics. They had low self-esteem. And yet their test score results were consistently better and their performance in the fields of mathematics were consistently better than their American counter parts who had high self-esteem about their mathematical abilities. The Americans felt good about themselves, but could not produce the results. The Japanese felt bad about themselves, but could produce the results.

When it comes to love God is not interested in how badly you felt for someone else or how much you thought about them. When it comes to love God wants results. He wants you to actually get out there and do something on their behalf. When it comes to love God wants you to love after Himself, first of all those to whom you are vocationally committed, your fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives and your immediate neighbors. If you fail to love these people, your love for other people will

not mean much at all. If you love those people, you will find that you will have also loved those others whom you would have liked to have loved.

God does not care how much legislation for which you advocated as if the government should love others on our behalf. The government's vocation is to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right. When the government does that it is loving its citizens. Other than that the government is not called to love. You are called to love directly your neighbors in your vocations.

And He does not care about how much love you thought about. He cares about how much love you did. In another epistle He states, "Brothers let us not love in word and in tongue, but in work and in truth."

And remember while you are loving the judge has you under review. And also remember the time of your review is at hand. It is coming. The judge is at the gates. The little red car is in the lane.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.