Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Did you hear what Paul wrote in our text? *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.*

This is not the only place in Scripture where we are instructed how to live our lives. We are to be holy, as our heavenly Father is holy. We, those who bear the name of God in Christ Jesus, have died to sin in the waters of baptism. Since we have died to sin, then we are no longer to live in it according to Romans six.

And, as we were again reminded on Wednesday, it is what we, as those who are one with Christ, are called to be. We are not to profane the name of God in what we believe, teach, and confess as Christians according to the Word of God. We are also to lead holy lives according to that Word of God.

We are to be different than the rest of the world. We are to be without sin, we are to be sanctified – and that word means, we are to be holy. The things of this world, while they entice us, are supposed to be resisted. We are to remain holy! We are to be without sin!

Too often we are not. We overeat, buffets are a balm for our gluttony. While wine is good for the stomach, a whole bottle can be a grim reminder in the morning of what a good idea moderation is. Why do we always seem to covet that which others have? And the world constantly tells us what we ***should*** believe about God and moral issues. It is why many have concluded that as long as they believe ***IN*** God, it is OK to go along with the world’s ideas.

God moved Paul to write, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Paul wrote those particular words in his letter to the Romans to remind us that while we do live ***IN*** the world, we are not ***OF*** the world. It seems that many have forgotten this passage from Romans, for everywhere we look, we find Christian pastors, congregations, and church bodies constantly conforming themselves to the things of this world. They conform to the world, even as they toss aside the clear teachings of Scripture.

We even find churches that have taken to perverting what happens in worship so that worship is being conformed to what is in the world. Reverence in repentance for the forgiveness of sins, being in God’s house to receive His gifts, is a different posture. There are many places which think people should be as comfortable in the house of God as they are in the local club. God told Moses that he was supposed to remove his shoes for the place where he was standing was holy ground. When we come into God’s house, we should remove our worldly trappings, our metaphorical shoes, in the presence of God, in order that we might be transformed by Him.

You and I even find ourselves conforming our hearts, minds, and actions to what the world has called acceptable behavior, at times. Yes, it is true that in regard to many of our neighbors, we have lived a life that at least outwardly appears good – we haven’t outwardly been vile and evil – but have we been holy? Have we been without sin – as God defines it – in ***ALL*** our thoughts, words, and deeds.

We are not as holy as we appear to some – nor as we would like to believe. Even more importantly, we are far from as holy as God’s righteous demands require us to be. Our thoughts and lives have been soiled by sin.

In our text, is Paul telling us to try harder and accomplish holiness?

Yes, you and I are called to holiness. That is right, I said that we have been called to holiness. Do you understand what that means? For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

How can this be since you and I, of ourselves, due to the total corruption of our human nature cannot be holy in and of ourselves? Yes, God requires us to be holy. You are called to be holy. It is why we pray the 1st Petition of the Lord’s Prayer.

And yes, it is very true that you do not earn salvation, nor do you even merit God’s grace as a reward for your works - but God does require them. Living faith will be exhibited in good works in the same way that a living peach tree will produce peaches. The peaches do not make the tree, but they are evidence that the tree is alive. In the same way, our works do not make us Christians, but they are evidence that faith is living in us.

Luther addresses that in his explanation of the third article of the Creed when it states that the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In fact, it is the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

Through the waters of baptism, you have been called by name to be God’s child. By water and the Word you were cleansed of all sin, you were made holy. Each day, as you live in your baptism, by daily contrition and repentance the old man in you is drowned and put to death and the new man arises to live before God in righteousness and purity – as God’s holy child.

What was our collect today? Did you hear it? O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength; keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

We ask God to do what He has promised to do, keep us holy, by keeping us from that which would assault and hurt the soul. Even before we prayed this prayer, He answered it. God gave us His Son, sacrificed His perfections to obtain for you and me, forgiveness.

It is that forgiveness which is given to us today that makes us holy. In the absolution Christ calls out to you, and you are cleansed of sin as the Word of Christ, the Gospel, makes you a new creation.

The Gospel calls out in the Word of Christ which makes of bread and wine, His own body and blood. You will eat and drink of this holy food, and be made holy by it.

You, dear friends, have been called to be holy. You are made holy as what Christ’s holiness was sacrificed upon the cross and is delivered to you in Word and Sacrament. Christ lives in you! You are called to holiness! You are to abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

In Christ, you are to mortify –to kill – your flesh. You are to keep the desires of your flesh which are in violation of God’s will, in control. Ask and expect God’s Spirit to keep you – both inwardly and outwardly – in faith and life. Ask and expect God’s Spirit to keep you holy. He will do it!

You are the dearly beloved of God, and it will show in your life and work. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Praise be to God in Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.