The doctor's face was somber and serious. "It's cancer – no doubt about it - and it's quite advanced." This is a horrible message to have to hear. Maybe it's one that you've had to hear. How does one react to such terrible news?

Since it is so horrible, one way to react is to deny it. "I'm not sick at all", you can say to yourself and anyone who will listen.

Another way is to blame it all on a wrong diagnosis. Despite all the tests and the doctor's expertise in recognizing the disease, the diagnosis must be wrong. "I don't have cancer, "you say. "It's just a nagging cough."

Another way to react to the diagnosis is to not react at all. You can just ignore it (as if that will make it all go away) and live life as you always have. "I'll be just fine," you say in hopes of, not only convincing those around you, but convincing yourself.

The problem here is not the diagnosis. The diagnosis does not kill. It is not the disease. The diagnosis only declares what the tests have found out: that you have the disease. Our reactions to the diagnosis will have no effect on our health. If you deny the diagnosis, blame a wrong diagnosis, or ignore the diagnosis, you will still die if you have the disease.

Therefore, the best way to react to the horrible sounding diagnosis is to accept it. By accepting it as being true and accurate, you are able to proceed with the treatment which can save you from death and restore you to a healthy life. What seemed to be so bad – a diagnosis of cancer – actually was a good thing.

In the same way, the law of God diagnoses all of us with the disease of sin. The prognosis is terrible. Sin is fatal100% of the time. Yet people hate to hear the Law of God and blame *it* for their troubles. It sounds negative, rather than positive. Preaching of the law is depressing, rather than

uplifting. Rather than cause us to fear or despair, this diagnosis causes us to react much in the same way as a diagnosis of cancer does.

First of all, some people will deny the diagnosis. "I'm not a sinner", they will say. "I'm a pretty good person who tries hard to do what's right." Holiness and perfection are no longer the standards by which people judge. Trying your best is the new standard. By that standard, who would ever be a sinner?

Secondly, other people will react by blaming the diagnosis. Simply put, the diagnosis of the law is wrong. A couple of days ago, the state of New York became the latest state to legalize homosexual marriage. The reaction was interesting. Many supporters stated that previous condemnation of homosexuality was in error. The Bible had it all wrong. The old laws were wrong. Intolerance and inequality are the real sins. The new law will strike against intolerance and support equality in marriage. How often don't we reject the condemnation of God's Law and the pastor who proclaims it by blaming it and him for being outmoded or unenlightened? How often don't we proclaim our behavior as just and right? "I may be flawed and I've made inappropriate choices," some people will say, "but the Bible is wrong for condemning my behavior and the liturgy goes a bit too far in calling me a poor miserable sinner."

Thirdly, many people will simply ignore the Law of God and its diagnosis altogether. They adopt a philosophy of "eat, drink, and be merry" as they seek pleasure and possessions without worrying about the penalty for their actions. "I'll be just fine," people will say, hoping to convince themselves and others of their spiritual and moral health.

Like in a medical situation, the problem here is not the diagnosis of God's Law. The Law is not bad, but good. Our text says, "What shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!" The Law does not kill, but promises life to all who obey it. In Leviticus, the Lord says, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD." (Lev. 18:5)

Just like in the medical example used earlier where the problem is the cancer, the problem in our lives is sin – not obeying the Law of God. As Paul says in our text, "For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me." It matters not what your reaction to the condemnation of the Law is. You can deny it. You can blame the pastor who proclaimed it. You can ignore it. However, since you have the disease of sin, you will die. The Bible says that all have sinned and the wages of sin is death.

So what good is the Law? The law of God only lets us know what sin is. Paul says, "Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" Sin uses that knowledge of the law to draw us into sinful actions. It's like when you a newly painted park bench. You might likely pay no attention to it. However, if there is a sign on it that says, "Wet Paint. Do Not Touch!", what is the first thing you do? You touch it to see if it is truly wet. It is the command printed on the sign which drew you into an activity you might never had done without it.

But, the knowledge of sin which the law gives us, like the knowledge of cancer which a diagnosis gives us, can also be a good thing – when it propels us to the cure. And that cure is not trying harder to do better. Imagine a person with stage four cancer being told that the cure was for her to try and be healthier. Self-treatment will kill you.

The cure for any serious life-threatening disease is outside of yourself. For cancer it may be a series of drugs, chemotherapy, radiation therapy and the like. As powerful and as difficult as those treatments are for cancer, the treatment for sin is even more powerful and difficult. The cure is Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not merely treat the disease of your sin from the outside by giving you advice, life coaching, or encouragement by which you could rightly obey the Law of God and be free from sin. Jesus took your disease upon Himself. I know many doctors who are very compassionate and dedicated to the healing of their patients, but what doctor would do that by taking the disease himself?

Yet that's exactly what Jesus did out of His great love for you. He did not merely "forgive" your sin. He took on your sin, my sin, and the sin of the entire world. In fact, the Bible says it much stronger. One of the most profound Bible verses (and one of my favorites) is 2 Corinthians 5:21 which states, "God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." He didn't just take on sin. He *became* sin. He endured the consequences of your sin – physical death by being crucified on a cross and spiritual and eternal death by being separated from His Heavenly Father on the cross.

But there's more. Sometimes you see people who have survived cancer but are still weak and sickly. The disease is gone but health has not been restored. Jesus not only removes the disease, but He also restores your health. He takes your sin upon Himself and, in its place, He gives you righteousness - His righteousness, His holiness, His perfection – by which you can stand before the Lord without fear on the Judgment Day. The Scripture says, "It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Some would say that we should not preach the Law of God because it will drive people away. They say we should just talk about the love of Jesus. But talking about the love of Jesus and His mercy without talking about the Law and sin makes about as much sense as talking about a cure for cancer without first speaking of a diagnosis of cancer. Until people hear that they have cancer, they will not be interested in a cure. In the same way, people will not be interested in the good news of God's love and forgiveness until they have first heard about the Law and our sin.

Instead of denying the Law, changing the Law, or ignoring the Law, hear the Law gladly. Instead of seeing it as something bad which is hurtful, understand God's Law to be something good which is helpful. Paul writes of the Law, "Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin."

Accept the Law's total condemnation of you and your sin for then you are free to receive, not just a treatment for sin (moralism or trying harder), but an absolute cure. Come to the Lord's House for that cure. The words of Absolution, the reading and preaching of the Word of God, and the body and blood of our Lord in Holy Communion provide the cure won for us on the cross by Christ and restore the righteousness given to us through the empty tomb by Christ.

Receive this cure regularly, not by force, but out of gladness and need. Can you imagine a cancer patient grumbling because he is forced to accept a sure cure for his disease? Can you imagine a cancer patient skipping treatments because she was busy or had better things to do? When pastors encourage, beg, and plead for regular church attendance, it is not in an attempt to force anyone to come or to distract anyone from other activities, but out of the desire that you receive the death-destroying and life-giving cure for your fatal disease of sin. Even the best and surest cure for any disease will do no good if it is not taken. The same is true here.

People will often say, "Since when has _____ (fill in the blank) become a bad word?" What is in the blank is a word or concept that should be considered good but is treated as bad. As a Christian, I would ask, "Since when has Law become a bad word?" In a sense, it always has because we don't like to be judged nor do we like our behavior condemned. Law *is* perceived to be a bad thing because it condemns us, but a good thing because it leads us to a cure in Christ. Therefore, as the title of this sermon says, whenever you consider the Law of God, remember: it is a good "bad thing" which leads you to the one very good thing – spiritual health and salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.