

July 24, 2022

Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Texts: Exodus 20:1-17; Romans 6:1-11; Matthew 5:17-26

All three of this morning's readings deal with a particular issue, namely, the Law. This is an area where we as Lutherans can often struggle. We're very good at talking about grace, how we are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

But when it comes to the Law, those places in Holy Scripture commanding us what we are to do and what we are not to do, we don't always speak as clearly. Sometimes we're tempted to look at things like the Ten Commandments and think that, because Jesus has died for us and forgiven all our sins, we don't really have to worry about them anymore. This is often referred to as "cheap grace."

Yet true grace is rather different. True grace connects us to Christ, and as He tells us, Christ doesn't throw out the Law or abolish the Commandments. Instead, He upholds them. He fulfills them.

When we break the Commandments as Christians, we are both sinning against Christ whose name we bear, and we are also sinning against the new life which God has given to us. From our readings today, we see these two characteristics of the Law: the Law shows us who God is, and the Law shows us who we are to be as God's people.

Let's address that first point, how the Law shows us God. Sometimes when we are reading the Commandments, they can sound to us as sort of arbitrary, as though God just pulled them out of thin air.

Man sinned in the Garden, and God figured that He better lay down some basic rules to keep order in this now-sinful world. And so why are things like lying and stealing sinful? Simply because God says so.

Now it is certainly true that, if God says something, then that's the way it is. That's part of what it means that He is the Almighty God. But it's not only this. If we hold this view, that the Commandments are just arbitrary rules, then it becomes easy for our sinful flesh to be resentful. We can become like children who grumble against their parents, thinking that mom and dad don't have any reason beyond "Because I said so" and that they must just be giving rules because they're mean.

But just like how good parents have good reasons for what they tell their kids, God has perfect reasons for why He gives the Commandments He does. Each one tells us about God and reflects His holiness and love.

The truth that each Commandment tells us about God connects to the second point, that the Commandments also teach us how we are to be as God's people.

To be a Christian isn't something that is superficial, some sort of outward label. No, to be a Christian is at the core of a Christian's identity, his reality. Paul talks about this in our reading from Romans.

When you became a Christian in the waters of Holy Baptism, that wasn't just some symbolic action or human ritual. No, in Baptism you are joined to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Himself. You become joined to the life of God Himself. You are given a new Father – God the Father – and a new family – the Holy Christian Church. God the Holy Spirit dwells in you, making your body His temple.

And so, what you do, and what you say, and what you think, become changed – sanctified – by this new existence. To obey the Commandments is simply to be who you are as God’s people. If God dwells in you, then God’s holiness will be reflected in you.

This doesn’t mean that you earn your place as a child of God by keeping the Commandments. No, God acts first in grace and mercy to make you His child.

He didn’t tell the Israelites, “Obey these Commandments and then I’ll save you from slavery in Egypt.” No, He first brings them out, delivering them by His power, and then once they are free from Pharaoh’s bondage He tells them how they are to live as His people.

Christ fulfilled the Law for us, shedding His innocent blood on the cross to save you from slavery to sin and death. Now, as His redeemed people, He gives you His Law, that by the power of the Holy Spirit within you you might live as one of His people.

So the Law shows us the holiness and love of God, and it also shows us how we as God’s people are to show forth that holiness and love. Let’s look at the Commandments and see what this means in a little more detail.

The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods. God doesn’t tell us this because He’s an insecure God who doesn’t want us to worship other gods and potentially have more fulfillment or fun or whatever. God tells us this because it’s true. There are no other gods out there.

There are all kinds of things that we might foolishly and sinfully worship and serve as gods, but they aren’t gods. There is only the One True God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Everything else is false, a lie, and our God loves us and doesn’t want us to be misled.

Also, God knows that He alone can save us from the eternal destruction that our sins have brought upon us, and so in love He doesn’t want us pursuing things that lead to destruction. He desires to give life, and only He, the only God, can give it.

We as Christians thus place our Lord God above all things, looking only to Him for all our good, all our comfort, all our peace, all our care. To hope or trust in anything else would be deceitful, both deceiving ourselves and deceiving those whom we interact with each day. Thus: You shall have no other gods.

The Second Commandment: You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. God’s name isn’t just a collection of sounds that is used to pick Him out of a group of others, like the name “Patrick” sets me apart from other middle aged men.

No, throughout the Bible, God’s name is connected to His very identity, who He is as God. It’s connected to His power, His authority, His presence. God grants us as His people to speak His name, to call upon Him in every trouble, to pray, to praise, and to give thanks to Him. To have God’s name is to be able to approach the Almighty without fear.

And so we as Christians must rightly use His name and not think that it’s something light or frivolous. We must not use it as profanity and cursing, connecting our loving, righteous God with our anger or stupidity.

We also must keep those promises we make in His name, be they wedding vows, promises made as parents or sponsors at a Baptism, or our Confirmation vows. Even if we don’t take such things seriously or

think that we can ignore them, God doesn't. As He says, "the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

**The Third Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.** Sabbath is a Hebrew word meaning rest. It's tied to the idea of completion, of nothing more needing done. God rests on the Seventh Day of creation because creation is finished, there is nothing more to do.

In this Commandment, God reminds us that He is the one who cares for us, who gives us rest. All things are in His hands, and the eternal rest He grants is beyond anything that this world could give. He also commands us to rest that we might dwell on Him and His Word, having a weekly glimpse of His peace and presence as we gather together with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When we choose to do something other than gather together and receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament on Sunday, we are saying that there's more to do, that God cannot offer us true rest and peace on that day, that other things are better for us at that moment. Sometimes there are things that come up which force us away from church, things like illness or job requirements, but it's important to note that these are the result of sin and our having to bear its consequences.

When we are able to go to church, but actively choose not to, we are saying that there are better things than the things of God, that the sinful world can supply better gifts than those which God gives.

**The Fourth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother.** God is our Father. He provides for us, protects and defends us, sacrifices for us. He has all authority, yet He uses His power and might to care for us, His children. He has all knowledge and wisdom, yet He patiently teaches us and leads us in the way of righteousness for His name's sake.

He reflects His divine love and order by establishing the family. Father, mother, and children are how He has created humanity to live and to flourish. As we respect and honor our great and loving God, we likewise respect and honor those whom He has placed in authority over us, be that fathers and mothers in the household, fathers of worldly authority like the government, and spiritual fathers like pastors.

And in this Commandment, those who are in authority are reminded that their authority comes not from themselves but from God, and that they should act in accord with His will, not their own.

**The Fifth Commandment: You shall not murder.** God is the one who creates and sustains life. He is its source, both this earthly life and the life to come. He gives it where He pleases, and He takes it away when He knows is right.

Thus, life is not something that we may try to create unnaturally or take away unjustly. If God blesses a man and a woman with a child, then it is not their decision to take that child's life. If God is sustaining life in someone who is suffering, who is very elderly, or who society sees as not valuable, it is not man's prerogative to end that life through euthanasia or suicide.

There are those to whom He has given the sword, the authority to end life, such as the government or individuals in self-defense, but in every case, that authority is wielded for the sake of the other, for the sake of God's justice.

The Sixth Commandment: You shall not commit adultery. God is perfectly faithful, forgiving, loving without end. His faithfulness does not depend on being shown faithfulness in return. As His word tells us, “if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.”

As God’s children, we are to reflect God’s faithfulness in our relationships, especially in that of marriage, which God created and blessed at the very beginning. The gifts of marriage and sex are to be used as God designed them to be, not how our sinful desires want them to be.

And just as God is faithful throughout all our lives, the Sixth Commandment applies throughout our lives. Whether we’re sixteen or sixty, whether we’re single, married, or divorced, God’s word – grounded in God’s faithfulness – stands.

The Seventh Commandment: You shall not steal. God is the creator of all, and He gives us all that we need for this body and life. Everything we have is actually God’s, and we are just stewards of whatever gifts He has given to us.

To steal, then, is to say that God hasn’t given you enough, and that you need what He has chosen to give to another. Stealing is saying that you know better than God who ought to have what.

The Eighth Commandment: You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. God’s word is truth. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. God is the creator of all that is good and true and beautiful. As God’s people, we are to speak the truth, because we are simply recounting or passing along what God Himself has established.

As an example for our time: God creates people as male and female. That isn’t a truth which we decide or change, it is grounded in God’s will. And so we as Christians must bear witness to that truth, even if a person has decided that he is now “she.” That’s not up to us, or to that person, but to God, and so we speak the truth which God has established, even if that person – *he* – doesn’t want to hear it and the world calls us bigots and haters for speaking it.

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments: You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. Here at the end of the Ten Commandments, God reminds us that He is the creator and ruler of all things, including our hearts and minds. We are to honor our Lord not only in what we do and say but also in what we think.

Thus it is wrong not only to steal what belongs to our neighbor, but it is also wrong to desire that we have it instead of our neighbor. Scheming to get our neighbor’s possessions is sinful, even if we never act on those plans. Thinking up half truths and loopholes to get our neighbor’s place in life, reputation, or other things is wrong, even if we never actually use them.

Christians are reborn in Christ, and this new birth entails our entire being. We are to serve God not only with our bodies, but also with our minds. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and our might.

On our own, corrupted by sin, we cannot hope to keep the Commandments as we are required. But we Christians are not on our own. We are washed in the blood of the Lamb. We are joined to the death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are new creations, made to walk in newness of life. We truly can delight in the Law of the Lord, because the Lord Himself dwells within us.

Let us not return to the darkness from which Christ brought us. Let us not seek to return to slavery to sin and bondage to death. Let us not insult our God and Father by mocking His words and rebelling against His will.

Instead, let us rejoice in the light and life which God has given to us. As Christians, we delight in the Commandments of our God, for in them He shows us both His holiness and how we reflect His holiness to an unholy world. Because He has given us His holiness, we will live with Him, in His glorious presence, forever.

In the name of Jesus, amen.