

2012_02_22 (Midweek Passion 1 / Ash Wed) Sermon Script – Ascension Batavia

Series: The Cross and the Catechism

Our Midweek series that we will consider is inspired by the Book of Concord:

“Such matters also concern the laity and the salvation of their souls. Therefore we also confess Dr. Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms as they are included in Luther’s works. They are “the layman’s Bible” because everything necessary for a Christian to know for salvation is included in them, which is handled more extensively in the Holy Scriptures.”

Every teaching of the Catechism relates to your salvation. This is not to say it is a substitute for the Bible, but rather it is a resource to aid in the Christian’s study of Scripture – to lead one into the Bible. The value of the catechism is found in its simple and concise dealings with our beliefs, teachings, and Christian life.

This passion season we will be traveling through the six parts of Luther’s Small Catechism. You may want to pull that red, or tan, or blue book depending on your upbringing. If its been a while, I invite you to blow off the dust. The schedule for our consideration of each of the six chief parts is found in your bulletin. In your home devotions, this would be a good refresher as we study these Bible truths.

Marking the beginning of the Passion Season, the focus of Ash Wednesday is one of humility and repentance with a steady look to the cross of Calvary. To reflect this tone, we begin our series on the cross and the catechism with a study of

1. The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1–17 (NKJV) — **1** And God spoke all these words, saying: **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. **3** “You shall have no other gods before Me. **4** “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; **5** you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, **6** but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. **7** “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. **8** “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. **11** For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. **12** “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you. **13** “You shall not murder. **14** “You shall not commit adultery. **15** “You shall not steal. **16** “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. **17** “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”

The Cross and the Catechism Reveal Our Jealous God.

Think now of something you value very highly. Think of something that if it were broken or destroyed, would just devastate you. Perhaps it is a family heirloom, something fragile, that you keep close watch over. Perhaps it is a loved one, a child. Now see someone handling it carelessly. Imagine someone purposely tempting you by abusing or wrecking this item. What you are feeling now is jealousy. And there is a time and a place for righteous jealousy. When you don't want someone else corrupting your child with destructive thoughts or lies, you rightfully get jealous. We ask the Spirit's blessing, as we consider this evening how . . .

The Cross and the Catechism reveal our Jealous God

So you've invested hours and hours in building this fragile work of art. I know with my son it may be a puzzle or a tower of blocks. And along comes his little brother who crawls all over it and destroys his creation. Or consider something you have invested so much time in. The Cross reveals our jealous God who has paid a high price to set us free. We read in v.5 . . .

Martin Luther was in tune and very sensitive to this high price. He had lived much of his life not understanding this from the right perspective. Rather than being set free from the burden of the law, for much of his life he looked at Christ on the cross and saw an even greater burden. He saw in that cross an angry God who punishes sin. Rather than freedom, he carried this as a burden for he felt the cross revealed how much further in debt he was to this righteous God.

From that perspective, the Cross does indeed show us our failures. It shows us what we all deserve. Jesus cried from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" This is a question only Jesus can ask, because only Jesus was perfectly innocent. If we hung there, forsaken by God, we would have to say that we are getting what we deserve.

The ten commandments reveal marks. I was never a dorm student at Immanuel in Eau Claire, but I remember distinctly "marks." The students would receive these for breaking various dorm rules – not cleaning their room, being out of bed after hours, watching a movie during study hall. These pail in comparison to what the 10 commandments reveal of us.

Sometimes the 10 commandments are divided into two parts. We call them the two tables of the law. The first three relate to our relationship with God – this, the first table, deals with love for God. Four through ten relate to our relationship with our neighbor – this, the second table, deals with love for your neighbor.

Concerning love toward God, Matthew 22:37 states that we are to **37 ... love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind.**' In the explanation to the third commandment we read, (cf. expl. to 3rd comm.) Think of the

ways our mind has wandered even in the few minutes since we've arrived at church. Think of how easily we are thinking about what needs to get done tomorrow or what other things I could be doing right now. We have carved idols out in our own life, serving ourselves, our flesh, and what will most benefit me. As Luther says, we should fear and love God "above all things."

Likewise our love toward our neighbor is not what it should be. In the fourth commandment God calls for us to honor our father and mother. Luther expounds based on other passages to include in this all our superiors – our boss at work, our governor, our president. As Luther puts it we are to "give them love and respect." This is virtually lost in much of our society. Where elderly used to be looked up to for wisdom and advice, guidance and correction, now they are looked at as weak, or unable to relate to the younger generation.

And Jesus tracks this lack of love all the way back to the heart. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witnesses, and things like that." This is what the 9th and 10th commandment also reiterate: the heart of the matter. For in these last two commandments we find the "desires," the "lust," the "coveting" that we all fall victim to.

However this is where the cross comes in. For all these sins, Christ went to the cross, carrying not just wood, but guilt. But we should not think as Martin Luther once did that God did this to to lay more of a burden on you. He did it to set you free. We read as God spoke to Moses, He introduces these 10 commandments with – (v.2). The LORD, Jehovah, a name which means "I AM" – the unchanging, eternal one. This unchanging one is the God who brought us out of the house of bondage. Before introducing these commands, God wants us to remember who He is. He is the God who has rescued us from slavery and wants us as His own.

The cross connects us to the words of the catechism in a new way. For we see at the cross, that Jesus kept both tables of the Law for us

The first table – He had perfect obedience toward God. This is shown in the Garden of Gethsemene all the way through the unfair trial and onward to the crucifixion. As He pleaded fervently that this cup would pass, He nevertheless prayed, "Not My will, but Yours be done." As the Roman cohort approached with swords and clubs He could have called down 12 legions of angels to fight for Him – but He didn't. He willingly set aside His divine rights to follow the will of His Father.

Likewise the second table – Jesus had perfect love toward His neighbor. As you hear Jesus' few words in the moments leading up to His death – how many of them are actually about Him. "Father forgive them . . ." "Weep not for me. . ." "woman behold your son. . ." He willingly submitted to government, even when He has every right to object to the illegal trial being held in the dark recesses of the night. The Son of God was spit on, slapped, blasphemed, and mocked, as Isaiah says, "As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."

This is the perfect love He has for you. **Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.**

By His obedience our marks are wiped out. The dorm students had to serve out their extra cleaning duties, or they were “dormed” and couldn’t leave the building, but you don’t have to serve out a single moment of your sentence. Your sentence paid by Jesus already.

And now we see the catechism and the ten commandments in a new light. Luther learned what real Christian freedom was all about – it was about keeping the commandments. But not so as to earn favor from God or meet His demands. We “fear, love, and trust in Him” because He first rescued, loved, and gave Himself for us.

Look at your catechism. How do each of the explanations to the commandments start? “We should fear and love God” , “we should fear and love God,” “we should fear and love God” – that . . . In every explanation we confess we should see the cross, for without the cross, there is no true fear, meaning no awe and respect for God, and there is no true love for God. Luther discovered that blessed truth as He saw the catechism through the cross. We confessed earlier – *He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased . . . [WHY?] . . . that I should be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence and joy.*”

As parents we don’t want our children to obey us simply because we have threatened them or they are just afraid of the consequences, we want our children to obey us because they “fear, love, and trust” us. We invest our love and care for their well being that they would love and respect us in return.

It is with this new found insight to the ten commandments that we learn fear and love God. He is rightfully jealous when other gods try to steal us away from Him. Our God is a jealous God. That is why He has carried out the ransom payment to own you. Yes, we must have the cross in order to treasure the catechism.

Lord, be jealous for us. Keep us ever in the care of Your kingdom, fearing, loving, and trusting You above all things. Hear us for the sake of the cross. Amen.