

## ***“Singing the Faith – Ten Commandments”***

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

“O Lord, open my lips ... and my mouth will declare your praise.” This evening, the Lord opens our lips to sing the Ten Commandments – the very Word of the Lord God, given to us through His servant Moses.

[Please turn to hymn 581 – we sing stanza 1]

These are the holy Ten Commands God gave to us by Moses’ hands  
When high on Sinai’s mount he stood, Receiving them for our good.  
Have mercy, Lord!

Martin Luther’s catechetical hymn on the Ten Commandments – “These Are the Holy Ten Commands” – begins with a very important announcement – that they are given “for our good.”

Like children who don’t want to be “bossed” and adults who chaff at rules and regulations – we poor miserable sinners often fail to see the “goodness” of God’s Law. This Law – given to Israel on Mt. Sinai – and recorded for us in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy --- is the very Word of the Lord. These are His Holy, Good, Commands.

[We sing stanza 2]

“I am alone your God, the Lord; No other gods shall be adored.  
But you shall fully trust in Me And love Me whole-hearted-ly.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

Our song echoes the meaning of the First Commandment in Luther’s Small Catechism – that we should “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”

There is only one true God. He alone is the Lord. He alone is to be your God. He alone is to be feared. And yet, such fear does not drive you away from the Lord – but combined with love and trust – He is the adored.

This is the language of faith. This is the “good” that God desires for you – a faith, which fears, loves, and trusts in Him above all things.

[We sing stanza 3]

“Do not My holy name disgrace, Do not My Word of truth debase.  
Praise only that as good and true Which I Myself say and do.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

As we sing through the Ten Commandments – take note of the ebb and flow – of how Luther highlights what we are to DO, and what we are NOT to do. As with His Small Catechism meanings – there are positives and negatives, if you will – “do this,” and “don’t do that.”

In the Second Commandment – the Lord says that you are not to misuse His name. Notice how Luther connects God’s name and God’s Word. The Word of God reveals who God is, and what He does – thus, His name.

If I were to say the name Scott Porath – the name brings to mind all that you know about him – who he is, and what he does. In an even greater manner, God’s name and Word go together.

It is “not good” that His holy name should be DISgraced – His holy Word Debased. This is done when His name and Word are emptied of all honor, glory, power and might – as if they are nothing.

Rather, we praise all that He says and does as “good and true” – because it flows from the very Word of God that gives and sustains our life – His Word that gives and sustains our faith in Jesus Christ, by which we are saved.

[We sing stanza 4]

“You shall observe the worship day That peace may fill your home, and pray,  
And put aside the work you do, So that God may work in you.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

The Second Commandment leads to the Third. To properly use God’s name is to “call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks” – which is why the Lord calls us to “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.”

The hymn says we are to “put aside the work you do, so that God may work in you.” And that’s what the Lord is doing when He calls us away from our hectic, “nose to the grindstone” lives – and gathers us around His Word and Sacraments.

He has gathered you here this evening – so that He might do His work on you. So that by the merciful forgiveness of Jesus Christ – He might give you Sabbath, give you His rest.

[We sing stanza 5]

“You are to honor and obey Your father, mother, ev’ry day,  
Serve them each way that comes to hand; You’ll then live long in the land.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

“You are to honor and obey Your father, mother, ev’ry day.” The Fourth Commandment does not conflict with the First Commandment. No, to “fear, love, and trust in God above all things” – is to see that He commands you to honor and obey your father and mother – because they are HIS representatives.

You are to live with your father and mother – as you live with God. As His representatives, they stand in His place – doing His work – for your “good.”

The Lord says that it is “good” for us to honor and obey all the authorities He has set over us – children their parents, citizens their governors, hearers of the Word their preacher of the Word. In all these representatives of God – He is at work, for your “good.”

[We sing stanza 6]

“You shall not murder, hurt, nor hate; Your anger dare not dominate.  
Be kind and patient; help, defend, And treat your foe as your friend.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

One way the Lord uses His Law (His commandments) is as a curb – to stop evil – to nip it in the bud – to prevent it from getting started and causing all kinds of chaos and harm. As the Father and Creator of all people – He does not want His beloved children to be hurt or harmed.

You may have noticed that breaking the Fifth Commandment (and all other commandments) can happen in “thought, word, or deed.” The hymn speaks of anger, that it “dare not dominate” – that it does not become the god of your life, controlling your thoughts, words, and deeds.

Rather than getting revenge, getting even with someone who has harmed you – the Lord would have you to be “kind and patient” – that you would “help, defend” – even “treat your foe as your friend.” It’s no wonder we keep singing – “Have mercy, Lord!”

[We sing stanza 7]

“Be faithful to your marriage vow; No lust or impure thoughts allow.  
Keep all your conduct free from sin By self-controlled discipline.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

Oh, how easy it is for our SELF to get out of control. The lusts of the flesh are constantly being fanned into flame by the sights and sounds that surround us. We live in a world where sex and sexual relations have been redefined and repurposed. Rather than the “good” that it is, and that God desires for you – the temptation is to use it for SELF, for selfish reasons – in ways that harm ourselves and others.

“Keep ALL your conduct free from sin” – again, your thoughts, words and deeds. Is your neighbor your husband or wife? If not, sexual thoughts and desires for them are “impure” – not “good” – so the Lord commands, “don’t do that” – flee from such temptations.

“Be faithful to your marriage vow” – even if it is a vow that is yet in the future.

[We sing stanza 8]

“You shall not steal or take away What others worked for night and day,  
But open wide a gen’rous hand And help the poor in the land.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

What God calls good, the devil calls evil – and what God calls evil, the devil calls good. The serpent pretends to be good by giving the fruit to Adam and Eve – but he is a liar, a deceiver – and what he says is good, is evil, stealing away the good God intends for Adam and Eve.

Likewise, it is evil for you to steal away from your neighbor that which the Lord has given to them. Again, His curb – “don’t do that.” Instead, “do this” – “open wide a gen’rous hand and help the poor in the land.”

[We sing stanza 9]

“Bear no false witness nor defame Your neighbor nor destroy his name,  
But view him in the kindest way; Speak truth in all you say.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

One of the “good” gifts that the Lord desires to preserve for your neighbor is that of a “good reputation.” To speak words that lie about your neighbor – defame him and destroy his name – cast a shadow over him.

Words are powerful. False words hide the truth. They can leave your neighbor to suffer alone in the darkness. But “the truth will set you free,” Jesus says. The truth shines light that scatters the darkness.

Your neighbor, like you, is a poor, miserable sinner. The truth that could be spoken about each and every one of us cuts us to the heart. However, like throwing your body on top of someone to protect him from being beaten – so your words are to cover the fallen one, shielding them from further disgrace.

Not in the sense of covering up sin, or enabling the sinner – but being gracious, showing love to those who do not deserve it – viewing your fellow man in the kindest way – using your words for their “good” – to help your neighbor, to protect his reputation.

[We sing stanza 10]

“You shall not crave your neighbor’s house Nor covet money, goods, or spouse.  
Pray God He would your neighbor bless As you yourself wish success.”  
Have mercy, Lord!

King David coveted Uriah’s wife Bathsheba. He desired, and schemed to get, something the Lord had not given to him – and it lead to adultery, murder, and death. As you look across the fence to your neighbor and see the blessings that the Lord has bestowed on him – give thanks to God.

And as you look at the blessings the Lord has bestowed on you – give thanks, and be content – for indeed, what the Lord gives, is for our good.

[We sing stanzas 11-12]

You have this Law to see therein That you have not been free from sin  
But also that you clearly see How pure toward God life should be.  
Have mercy, Lord!

Our works cannot salvation gain; They merit only endless pain.  
Forgive us, Lord! To Christ we flee, Who pleads for us endlessly.  
Have mercy, Lord!

The Ten Commandments not only curb sin, and lead us into that “good” life the Lord desires for us and our neighbor – the chief work of God’s Law is to show “that you have not been free from sin.”

This is “good” for us to know, otherwise we would take the Lord’s holy commands – and use them as the means of our salvation. As we sang – “Our works cannot salvation gain; they merit only endless pain.”

Salvation comes only through the work of Jesus Christ – who sheds His blood and gives up His life – to forgive and redeem us from our sin. Christ alone sets you free – not from the Law – but from the curse and burden of the Law. Forgiven and free in Christ Jesus, the Law becomes a delight – a guide for living God’s “good” and holy life. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.