

First Thing's First

Pastor Sabrina Vasta

Today we are beginning our summer sermon series on Luther's Small Catechism. We have a copy of the Catechism available for each family to take home. Perhaps, if you were raised Lutheran, this will bring to mind fond memories of your confirmation. Depending on your age, you might remember having to memorize the Small Catechism and then standing up in front of the congregation to recite or be asked questions about it. If you weren't you will be asked to do so by the end of our summer series, so make sure you take these books home and study them – just kidding!

We will be working our way through the entire Small Catechism in sermons and a Bible study throughout the summer, beginning, as Luther did, with the 10 Commandment. And this morning, we will dive in by looking at the 1st and 2nd commandments. First, you shall have no other gods before me, and second, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

I was recently talking to my niece. She had her first grade orientation last week and I was asking her if she was excited to be going into first grade, to which she replied, "No because they have so many rules. Believe me, I have enough rules to follow in kindergarten."

It did make me think, though, how many rules we have to follow in our lives – rules from the government, rules from our society, our marriages or families, in our schools and job. To hear that God has some rules that we should follow might not sound particularly uplifting. But what I hope this whole series will emphasize is that the 10 Commandments are not to stifle us, to hold us down, to make us feel bad, but rather are life-giving, life-affirming, and they always remind us of hope.

So then how can these commandments, in general, and the first and second commandment, in particular, give life to us? Chris Hedges, a theologian and war correspondent for 20 years in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans wrote a book called *Losing Moses on the Freeway: the 10 Commandments in America*.

The book originated in a series of 10 stories the author wrote for The New York Times, each story based on one of the commandments. In it he writes this, “The commandments are guideposts. They bring us back, even when we stray, as we all do, to the right path. They are our protection against the siren calls of glory, wealth and power that will ultimately dash us against the rocks.... The commandments guide us toward relationships built on trust rather than fear. Only through trust can there be love.” It’s all about our relationship with God, because only when we have a good relationship with God do the rest of the relationships in our lives work out.

The 10 Commandments are found in two passages in the Bible, Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. And in both places, God begins with a sort of prologue, “*And God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.’*”

This, to me, speaks volumes about how life-giving the 10 Commandments really are. Right before God was about to hand down these commandments to the Israelites, God spoke these word – God spoke. Sometimes we get so turned off by the fact that God has rules at all that we miss the grace in the fact that God chose to speak to us, mere human beings.

God speaks, and this is what God says, “I brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” God reminds the Israelites that they are saved before he gives them these commandments. As we go through these next weeks of looking at the Ten Commandments, I

think it's important to remember that God has already redeemed us through the death of Jesus. That is good news, life-giving news. Now let's move to the first commandment.

The full reading of the first commandments from Exodus is as follows: "Thou shall have no other gods before me. Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

As Luther writes in his Small Catechism, the meaning of the first commandments is this, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." This is the first commandment, and it is the first commandment for a reason. Because the fact is, once you have broken any of the other 9 commandments, you have broken this one. If you use God's name in vain, you have forgotten God. If you fail to take time for worship, you have forgotten God. If you dishonor your parents, you have dishonored God. If you kill a person, you have forgotten the God who made and loved them. And so on. And when you forget God, and begin to seek order, or meaning, or control, or satisfaction in other things, everything else begins to fall apart.

This commandment is really about putting first things first. What is really important in our lives, in this world, for our futures? I grew up in a big Catholic church in New Jersey. Every other Catholic church in town but except our church would post its Mass schedule on the church sign in front of the church. We didn't have a church sign, but there was always a poster staked in the ground on the front lawn announcing what time the weekly bingo game started. My dad was president of a church council a few years, and once he told us a gentleman came to the meeting to complain about the bingo sign seeming to supersede the time of mass, to which the priest replied, "My son, our parishioners know when we hold Mass, but we have to be sure the Protestants know when we hold bingo."

Talk about holding first things first. What does this commandment really mean, to have no other gods before the one God? Luther in his Large Catechism wrote this: “To have a god means to have something we are supposed to look to for all good and in which we are supposed to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart...Anything that your heart now relies and depends on, that is really your God.”

The danger that God sees in us is not that we don't call on Him anymore, or that we don't speak God's name or turn to him or that we completely forget him. Rather, the danger that God recognizes in us is that when we call on God, our hearts are ultimately still bound by other things, powers, and authorities, other idols.

Unlike the Israelites, we may not make idols out of wood or stone or gold, and we may not bow down to statues or visit the temples of other gods. No, our idols are more subtle, perhaps, things like money, success, popularity, pleasure – these are common everyday idols, false gods that people worship. Even people without these things can still worship these false gods. Someone without money who can only think of how to get it and who envies the rich and is never content or satisfied – that person, too, is worshipping a god.

And what is still more difficult to imagine, even good gifts from God can take the place of God. Family, friends, husband, wife, good job, comfort, success, when we love any of these things or people more than God, that is idolatry.

That's hard to hear, I think but an extension of the first commandment is that we are commanded to avoid giving any other thing the place of worship that God deserves. Not money. Not comfort and success. Not your spouse, not your kids. Not your friends. We look

for people and things to save us all of the time and these are just as forbidden as making a shrine to a new god we just made up.

And that's where it becomes clear how this commandment gives us life and hope. Every substitute god in the world will disappoint us, even the ones we've made. But God will always be there, regardless of our circumstance: whether we are successful or failing, rich or poor, healthy or sick. God has saved us and redeemed us and constantly gives us new chances, and when we truly recognize that, our only response will be to worship God and God alone.

This commandment calls us to be passionate Christians. It is a reminder for us to come out our tendency toward half-heartedness, just going through the motions. Its purpose is to keep us from having a detached Christian spirit, to make us realize that even in our seemingly monotheistic, modern culture, we are always surrounded by other gods.

The second commandment, "Thou shall not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain," also has an important meaning and life-giving properties. According to Luther's Small Catechism, this commandment means, "We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks."

Luther starts his explanations for all the remaining commandments, two through ten, with the words, "We should fear and love God so that. . ." In this case, how we use God's name and how gladly and diligently we hear his word are reflections of how we are or are not fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things

I pretty sure that most people in this room, myself included, have probably said, "Oh, my God," or even a curse word a time or two in your lives. Have we broken this commandment?

Well... yeah. We may not do it purposefully or intentionally, but the fact is, how we handle the Name of God speaks about our relationship with him.

In the ancient world names were inseparable from the person whom they identified. To call upon God's name is to put yourself into his presence. It was more than just a name, even though we often treat names as empty words in modern times. In our society, God's name is invoked millions of times a day but rarely in faith. It is used as filler in our speech, but even so, this casual treatment has consequences. Whether a surprised, "Oh, my God," or even a text OMG, the result is the same. We can't possibly believe that God is present and God's holy is treated without reverence and often with contempt.

The Second Commandment deals with words. Some view words as meaningless, but words are fundamental to our faith, and as Luther points out, we either praise God or we praise ourselves.

It might sound, again, like just another rule, but like the First Commandment, this commandment is meant to be life-giving for us. Luther said we should teach our children to thank God and call on God all the time. God wants us to use his name in prayer and supplication, in glorifying and praising, in all ways appropriate. That we are even given a name to call God is a gift from God in and of itself. That God listen to us when we call on him is nothing short of a miracle.

God doesn't want us to have any other gods because God wants us to have Him, the only one we can rely on, anyway. And God doesn't want us to abuse God's name because God wants us to know that when we call on Him, He is there, listening, our God who gives us hope, gives us comfort in this world, and has already forgiven and redeemed us so that we can share in eternal life with Him forever. And to that we say with all reverence and awe. Thank God.

Pentecost Sunday. 3rd Commandment. Acts 2:1-21. **“Day One”**
Pastor David Mattson

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” 14But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. 21Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Luther - Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. What does this mean? We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect His Word and the preaching of it, but gladly hear and learn it.

Introduction: The Small Catechism review... “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of slavery...”

Sabbath... literally means to stop, quit, cease, take a break...

Sabbath equals freedom...

Slavery... In the ancient world, perhaps half of the population were slaves... no day off for anyone... ‘My boss is killing me’ was the literal truth... You could a work a person to death...

Celebrate that our sin, failures, shames, regrets, sin... is overcome by Jesus’ love on the cross... Freedom.

Sabbath equals Easter...

First day of the week... Day of worship switched from Saturday to Sunday because of Jesus' resurrection...

Garrison Keillor story about a memorial service at a graveside... lo and behold the minister officiating wasn't Lutheran, but Unitarian... since it wasn't Lutheran there wasn't any talk about redemption... salvation... eternal life... Instead there was a lot of talk about "living in the moment!"

Sabbath is a celebration of the resurrection, every Sunday, the world's greatest news... Rejoice... That's how our services should be too... Yes, we should reflect on our sin, our weaknesses, but that's not where our worship begins or ends, but thanking God for His marvelous gift...

Gratitude...

Gerhard Frost... tells the story of his Grandson invited over to a friend's house to eat. Much to his surprise, the family just began eating, no grace, no prayer before the meal. The grandson surprise, just watched and then exclaimed—'Oh, I get it. You're just like my dog. You just dig right in!'

Sabbath has always been a testimony to the world... that the Jews are different...

Closing: Pentecost... The birthday of the church... Empowerment... They were all together... Holy Spirit came... The Holy Spirit continues to come... Come, Holy Spirit...

"Christmas, Easter are biblical facts. Pentecost says, "Those facts are for you." (The Lutheran Hour)

4th Commandment. Dads and Grads Sunday. June 19. **“Honor”**
Pastor David Mattson

(Slide 1) The Small Catechism... 10 Commandments—vertical commands (1-3); horizontal commands (4-10).

This morning I want to speak about honor... How we give honor... more than just scooting over in a pew... But this command...

1) This is an intergenerational commandment... (Slide 2)

Today, the horizontal commandments begin with the most important, the first, the beginning relationship, between parent and child... “Honor your father and mother...”

Honor your father and mother isn’t about teaching rebellious teenagers, it was first teaching sinful adults to care for their older parents... Before social security, before Medicare, before nursing homes and all of our societal institutions that care, in the context of the commandments, there was only the family, and the extended family, and the people of God. This commandment is actually directed towards elderly parents...

Honor – listen. Honor – patient.

Speaking of generations, a retired pastor wrote the following short reflections about his aging:

(How to Honor your Mother and Father – 05.10.09 – Dr. Rev. Carol Kerr)

“I will test the patience of my golfing partners by taking little naps while frozen over an important put.” That’s teaching patience.

“I will teach my dog to fetch my neighbor’s morning paper, but I will always return it after I have read the sports and comics!”

“I will ask people for directions and then argue with them.”

Honor – listen. Honor – patient. All generations...

2) This is a command that comes with a blessing. (Slide 3)

Exodus 20 (and Deuteronomy 5): *Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

In that first setting, long before social security, children had to take care of their parents... This law was basically saying, take care of your older parents and teach your children by your actions, because it will come back to you... Your children will learn about honor by seeing you treat your parents and others with respect, care, concern.

Honor – speak well of... Encourage... Give thanks... Children are watching. They will understand what honor means and how to live honorably as they watch you... honor and treat others with respect too...

Speaking of honoring... *We give to our confirmation graduates the following book: The Lutheran handbook... (Slide 4) All kinds of practical advice... One chapter is devoted to the problem of people sitting in your spot... how to deal with people sitting in your pew... major religious issue for some... (Slide 5) Pretty much a joke... (Read – “Smile. View. Welcome.”)*

The point is: kids watch our actions... they learn honor from us... they learn manners, respect from us...

Internet... every sin, every weakness, every word is interpreted maliciously... and passed on... Instead of passing a blessing on, instead of paying it forward, much which is passed on is divisive, half-truths, looking at people motivations in the worst possible light...

What goes around, comes around. Every religion has this concept... (Buddhism, Islam, Judaism).

What goes around; comes around... There's a lot of just down to earth wisdom in that... truth, but not the whole truth... sometimes evil prospers...

Honor – speak well of... Give thanks for... And with that honor, comes a blessing back around...

3) What if the person is acting dishonorably? (Slide 6)

Jesus always challenges us to live beyond and above the actions of others... Not to live at the level of callousness, but to live above...

The cross of course is what we look to at all times and places... Jesus was treated with such dishonor, abuse, torture, nailed to wood, and unlike the others crucified that day who cursed, and spit... Jesus acts, with more than honor, grace, and truth.

What if the person, the parent is acting dishonorably? We might need to leave the situation, might need to get out of there, we might need to pray, we might need to speak the truth, all of those things, but the great challenge of following Jesus is not to let the crowds determine your actions, who you are.

Honor your father and mother. This is an inter-generational commandment, all of us to act with honor. This is a commandment with a blessing—what goes around, comes around. And even when people are acting dishonorably, the hard road of following Jesus isn't for the weak of heart, but the strong of Spirit.

(Slide 7) Closing: Grads—we honor you. Dads—we honor you. Congrats...

I'll leave you with one more story of honoring. In his book, *Disappointment with God*, writer Philip Yancey relates a touching story from his own life: **(Slide 8)**

One time on a visit to his mother—who had been widowed years earlier—when Yancey just turned one—they spent the afternoon together looking through a box of old photos. A certain picture of him as an eight-month-old baby caught his eye. Tattered and bent, it looked too banged up to be worth keeping, so he asked her why, with so many other better pictures of him at the same age, she had kept that one.

Yancey writes, “My mother explained to me that she had kept the photo as memento, because during my father’s illness it had been fastened to his iron lung.” During the last four months of his life, Yancey’s father lay on his back, completely paralyzed by polio at the age of twenty-four, encased from the neck down in a huge, cylindrical breathing unit. With his two young sons banned from the hospital due to the severity of his illness, he had asked his wife for pictures of her and their two boys. Because he was unable to move even his head, the photos had to be jammed between metal knobs so that they hung within view above him—the only thing he could see. The last four months were spent looking at the faces he loved.

Philip Yancey writes, “I have often thought of that crumpled photo, for it is one of the few links connecting me to the stranger who was my father. Someone I have no memory of, no sensory knowledge of, spent all day, every day thinking of me, devoting himself to me, loving me... The emotions I felt when my mother showed me the crumple photo were the very same emotions I felt that February night in a college dorm room when I first believed in a God of love. Someone is there, I realized. Someone is there who loves me. It was a startling feeling of wild hope, a feeling so new and overwhelming that it seemed fully worth risking my life on.”

(Slide 8-click 2) Grads and Dads, we honor you... And all of us are called to give honor... listen... present... and even if someone acts dishonorably, doesn't change who we are... children of this God, who is love. Amen.

How Not to Kill **Pastor Sabrina Vasta**

We are moving on in our summer series on Luther's Small Catechism through the 10 Commandments. Today we are looking at Commandment No. 5, Thou Shalt Not Kill. Well, this is an easy one, right, straight-forward and simple. Pretty hard to disagree with. We might even say that while some of the commandments are pretty hard to follow at time – after all, who hasn't ever told a tiny white lie or disobeyed their parents a time or two – this commandment, on the other hand, is a little easier. Anyone here plan on committing a murder? Okay, good, then onto coffee hour, right?

Well, I actually think there is quite a bit more to this commandment than first meets the eye. I recently read a story told by the Chief Judge of the South Carolina Court of Appeals, Alexander Sanders, Jr., when his daughter Zoe graduated from college about something that happened when she was just 3 years old.

Sanders said he came home from work one day to find his home in turmoil because his daughter Zoe's pet turtle had died, and she was heartbroken. The mother had been unable to comfort Zoe, so Saunders tried his best.

First, he told her that they could go to the pet store and buy another turtle, but that was not a comfort to little Zoe. So, desperate to quiet her tears, he said, "I tell you what, we'll have a funeral for the turtle." Because she didn't now what a funeral was, he kind of explained it like a birthday party with ice cream and cake and balloons, and inviting all the neighborhood children to come over and play. All because the turtle died.

This sounded pretty good to Zoe. All of a sudden, the turtle's death became a reason to rejoice. But suddenly, as they were planning the grand funeral, father and daughter looked down and noticed that the turtle had begun to move and was soon crawling away as lively as ever.

Sanders was speechless, but Zoe looked up at her father with her big beautiful eyes and – with all the innocence of her tender years – she said quietly, “Daddy, LET’S KILL IT.”

Thou shall not kill – what does this commandment really means? I would like to do three things this morning, first, talk about what this commandment means in more detail, then look at the negative side of this commandment, how we are not to kill. But third, I would also like to look at this commandment from the positive side because every time we read, “Thou shall NOT…” in any of the commandments, we need to try to understand what God saying we SHOULD do?

So first, what does this commandment really mean? It means that the Bible is always against killing, right? Definitely always against it – except, of course, when it’s not against it. In Ecclesiastes 3 we read that there is “a time to kill.” The Israelites in the Old Testament are instructed by God – or so they interpret it – to kill on many occasions, wiping out entire cities, men, women, and children. And in Israelite society, the list of offenses that merited capital punishment was quite lengthy, including, in addition to crimes like manslaughter, sexual immortality and insulting one’s parents.

God gives this commandment to Moses, though, to pass to the Israelite people, and the commandment is Thou Shall Not Murder. So is the Bible against killing or not? Is killing always wrong or not? See, it’s already getting tricky.

In some Bibles, this commandment is translated Thou Shall Not Murder, which has a different connotation in the English language. Some have argued that this commandment is not against all killing, but rather against murder, meaning unjustified with malice or intent. Maybe a Hebrew word study will help us out a little bit, because who doesn’t like to do foreign language word deconstruction at 8/10 in the morning on a Sunday morning? The Hebrew word *ratsach* in

this passage can be translated murder or kill, but the truth is, the word is used very often in the Old Testament. Sometimes it is used to describe a killing motivated by hatred and malice, but just as often, it describes a killing that is justified, legal, or unintentional or war-related.

Personally, I like the translation thou shall not kill because it doesn't allow us to excuse away certain types of death that we might call unintentional or legal or justified killings, at least not offhandedly. It forces us to reflect upon the commandment and the fact that taking any life at all means one is acting in God's stead and any such action requires a lot of careful thought.

If you don't think that you have ever broken this commandment, have ever had a problem following this commandment, perhaps you should think again. The purpose of the commandments, the law, Luther always said, was to help us understand where we have a tendency to sin, to fall away from what God wants for us so that we can ask God to help us. It is only in recognizing our sins that we could ever hope to be better next time.

So I'd like to spend the rest of this time thinking about ways in which we might be more mindful of this commandment in our daily lives, first by refraining from killing, and then by living into the positive aspects of this commandment.

This commandment - along with all of the others - is addressed to the second person singular. It's speaking not to a crowd of people amassed at the base of Mount Sinai, but to individuals - you and me. God is concerned about the "murder" that is in the heart of individual men and women.

Killing is not simply a matter of what we do. It is a matter of what we think and what we say. It has to do with our attitude. If I hate someone, then I have the spirit of death in my heart, the same spirit that leads to killing. We may not be murderers, but we can still have killing in our hearts.

I think this is the way Jesus was looking at it. It's not enough just to stop short of actually murdering someone. In the Sermon on the Mount he said, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire."

Jesus goes right to the heart of matter, convicting us of the fact that we are all guilty of murder of the heart. Who here can claim to be innocent of angry outbursts of anger or occasion name-calling, even if not face-to-face? I mean let's face it: many of us make murderers out of ourselves every day on the freeway! Verbal abuse unleashes the same anger as physical abuse, but the wounds inflicted can cut deeper and last longer.

Killing happens in a lot of ways beyond physical death. Spirits can be broken just as surely as bodies can. And our words and attitudes can violate the spirit of the commandment just as surely as if we had pulled the trigger of a gun.

Billy Graham, you probably know, is a famous evangelist and preacher who has probably preached the gospel to more people than anyone else in history. His wife was once asked if she had ever considered divorce during their long marriage. To which she answered, "Divorce, no. Murder, yes." Actual physical murder is just a tiny extension of the anger and bitterness that all of us have at some points in our lives.

And our personal choices and behaviors are not always life-giving. We drive too fast or text and drive, we smoke and drink to excess, we disregard our health until it's too late. It is simply too easy to ignore the poverty around us. Polluting factories and toxic waste facilities are usually found in the poorest communities. There are so many who can't afford health insurance.

If as a society we know all of this and do nothing, are we contributing to death? This may not be killing, but it's certainly not a reverence for life, either.

Which brings me to my final point. What I really think would be most helpful in terms of thinking about what this commandment means in our life today, right now, is taking a look at the commandment not just from the negative side, you shall not kill, but also in positive terms: you shall have reverence for life. You shall encourage life, you shall celebrate life, you shall see life as sacred.

This is what Luther writes in his Small Catechism: "Thou shalt not kill. *What does this mean?*--Answer. We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need.

That's a little bit different. It's not enough just to refrain from murdering people – although we should probably do that, too. But to have reverence for life, to encourage and celebrate living – that demands a little more from us.

If the opposite of killing or murder is cherishing life, how can we do that? How do we work to make the world a livelier, friendlier, more joyful, more just, more peaceful place? The challenge is to be God's instruments, channels of God's grace, to see all life as a precious gift.

When I was in Honduras on the church missionary trip, some of us went to visit a public school with the mission director, Miguel, who was born in Honduras but now lives in Connecticut. In the public schools in Honduras, unlike here, you can talk about God and Jesus and the Bible as much as you want. But even though he told us that, I had trouble really getting into that subject with the kids in this high school classroom. But not Miguel. He joked around with them a lot, and then he asked them if they knew Jesus, he shared the gospel with them, he had them memorize a gospel verse, and he prayed with them. And after we left, he told me that

he used to have trouble sharing the gospel with people, until he realized that God had entrusted him with that responsibility, and he felt that if he didn't take every single opportunity given to him to do that, well, then that was on him. He would be accountable. Can you imagine if we all had that passion? Talk about a way to revere life.

Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Jesus calls us to live abundantly and to nurture and encourage life, abundant life, for everyone.

In his Small Catechism, Luther points out that this commandment is broken not just when we hate and hold malice in our hearts, but also when we have it in our power to prevent harm to another person, and we fail to do so. This expands the range of Christian moral responsibilities quite a bit and changes our understanding to one of passivity to activity. Not acting to prevent harm, not acting to encourage love and cherish life, these are all ways we disrespect this commandment, Thou Shall Not Kill.

Prov. 31:8 reads, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." That is just one of hundreds of passages in the Bible that make it clear that God wants his people not just to avoid committing murder, but to actively promote and protect human life.

If murder or killing is the treating of someone as sub-human, unworthy of life, then we can practice the reverse of murder by thinking of others as more important than ourselves, loving selflessly and expecting nothing in return.

The meaning of the fifth commandment is this: respect life. Cherish life. Reverence life. Bask in life. And hold the lives of others as valuable as your own. Amen.

July 3, 2011. **6th Commandment.** Exodus 20 (Deut. 5). John 8:1-11.
Pastor David Mattson

While Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. 3The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Review 10 Commandments... Vertical dimension; Horizontal dimension. The 6th commandment—thou shalt not commit adultery. Talk about this in 3 ways: Yesterday, Today, Forever.

POINT #1: YESTERDAY... What did this commandment mean originally to the Hebrew people?

What about the case if a man is jealous and thinks, his wife has committed adultery, but has no proof... Numbers 5 speaks to that very point... Numbers 5 says, the jealous man shall bring his wife and a "jealousy offering" to the priest, who will mix holy water with dust from the temple floor and make the woman drink it. Once, twice, three times. The third time, sometimes some ink is added to the potion... If she drinks and is fine, she's innocent, if she gets sick, she's guilty...death!

Adultery in the Old Testament was primarily a woman's problem! The sixth ten commandment ("Thou shalt not commit adultery" [Ex. 20:15, Deut. 5:18]) does not refer to adultery as generally thought of today. In the Old Testament a married man, but not a married woman, could have sexual relations outside of marriage and not be an adulterer. Under the Hebrew system, a man commits adultery only if the act is with another man's wife or betrothed--in effect a property crime.

The penalty for adultery is death for both parties (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Adultery in the Old Testament was primarily a woman's problem!

And that's the brilliance, the amazing light, the unbelievable courage that is Jesus! That's some of the context of our Gospel, in the New Testament times, still a woman's problem, still a matter of life and death... But Jesus' words on the 6th commandment have to do with the heart... And of course, our passage this morning, one of the Bible's best-known passages speaks of forgiveness. Thank you Jesus!

So that's the thinking about adultery in Biblical times—primarily a woman's problem and it was about death, but for Jesus of course...

POINT #2: TODAY.

So honestly, we've let go of much of the Old Testament laws around this commandment... We can let go of much of the Old Testament's interpretation of this command, instead focus on Jesus, saying it's a matter of the heart... The positive side of this command is the call for all of us, young and old, single and married—to be people who keep our word. Faithful. Fidelity. That's the perfect word to reflect on in terms of this weekend too...

At least once a month, since I became ordained, deal with some issue related to infidelity, adultery in the family... Pain. Eventually it comes to the question: Who do you plan to be?

("What's in Your Heart?" February 5, 2011 by Alyce McKenzie)

I'm reminded of a story told by retired United Methodist Bishop. *Bishop Kelly was elected in 1984, was the second woman and the first African American woman to be elected bishop of any major denomination. When she was 10 years old she lived with her parents in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her father was a pastor. One morning as she was getting ready for school, she heard a knock on the front door. She ran down the stairs to answer it. There on the step was an imposing woman with a confident air. Only later did she find out that the visitor was Mary McCleod Bethune. Dr. Bethune was a prominent educator and civil rights leader, founder of a school for African – American students in Florida that became Bethune-Cookman University, and advisor to Presidents. She was in town to raise money for her school, an effort with which Leontine's father was helping.*

Bishop Kelly, as a 10-year old girl, says that as she looked up in awe at this imposing woman, Dr. Bethune looked down at her, with no preliminary statement or question like "how are you this morning?" or "could you go get your parents?" She simply looked at her and inquired, "Little girl, who do you plan to be?" At the moment, the fifth grade girl had no plans to be anything other than a fifth grade girl. But the question started her thinking, and it came to guide her life.

Mary McCleod Bethune's question is a good one: "Who do you plan to be?" It all depends on what's in our hearts. Thou shall not commit adultery. This is about fidelity, our faithfulness, about our hearts... Who do you plan to be?

POINT #3: Yesterday, today, forever...

Japanese stone markers, 400 years old... warning, don't build... tsunami came up this far... In some ways, I think of the 10 Commandments in that light... warnings... don't build there, don't live there, don't go... if you do... destruction will happen...

("A Sermon on the Sixth Commandment" 20 July 2003, Seminarian Chris Wogaman) According to a Gallup poll, 90% of those polled considered adultery to be "always" or "almost always" wrong.

Every premarital counseling session I have, every couple says, fidelity is absolutely important... and taking this out of the realm of marriage—keeping our word, keeping promises—that's one of those old markers that is for our protection... So the waves of pain don't sweep over our lives...

And still, all of us have broken promises, or helped others break promises or been on the receiving end of some form of infidelity...

Only one is faithful... Jesus... Romans 7 – our lesson...

As an aside, I mentioned before that in the Jewish tradition, they order the commandments differently; what the Jews regard as the first commandment or word, many Christians just dismiss as a prologue or introduction to the commandments. But in Jewish tradition, the first commandment is not to have “no other gods before me,” but is instead: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exo 20:2).

In other words, the first word of life with God is to, “Remember what God has done for you!” God is faithful... That’s Jesus... the cross and resurrection... God is faithful and His faithful presence, love, strength gives us faith, love, strength... How will we respond to God’s fidelity, God’s faithfulness? (Posted by Geoff McElroy on October 02, 2008)

Yesterday... Today... Forever...

Closing: Some of you gave me some good lines like: *“If you keep this commandment, there’ll be no fireworks in your home.”*

Yesterday... Today... Forever God is faithful...

Fourth of July, we celebrate our freedom... Birth of our nation... we also remember the fidelity, of those who have worked so hard...

*“O beautiful for heroes proved In liberating strife.
Who more than self their country loved And mercy more than life!
America! America! May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness And every gain divine! Amen.*

For their faithfulness and our faithfulness and more importantly God’s faithfulness... Amen.

Thou Shalt Not Steal

Sabrina Vasta

When you think of some of the greatest, most notorious thieves in American history, what names might pop into your mind? Bonnie and Clyde, maybe? John Dillinger? How about Billy the Kid or Sabrina Vasta – well, I may not be famous, but my life of crime began at an early age. Luckily, though, it was pretty short-lived. When I was about 7 or 8, I was collecting stickers with scenes from my favorite movie that were freely given away in boxes of kitchen garbage bags. I had the whole set except one, and it was the one I wanted most. And one day, when I was with my mom shopping at the grocery store, I snuck to the aisle with the garbage bags and opened four or five boxes until I finally found the sticker that I wanted, and I stole it.

I had a lot of guilt about that action over the time, though not enough to return it or even tell my parents. But I knew I had broken the law, and I knew I had broken one of the Ten Commandments, which was, in my mind, a bigger deal.

What I did was a common petty crime of theft, but the longer I have lived, the more I have realized that just about everyone in our society steals in some way, shape, or form. Stealing has become so common, in fact, that most of our society rationalizes a wide variety of property crimes as “not really wrong.” After all, “everyone does it.” Who among us has never stolen an idea or a sentence from the Internet, downloaded music for free, taken a pen or sticky notes or other office supplies home, fudged just a little bit on taxes, stolen someone’s good name through gossip or any other of a thousand ways that almost acceptable stealing takes place in our society?

When we really consider all of the forms that stealing can take, I think we will realize that we may all be guilty of the crime of theft in some way in our lives. In fact, it was Martin

Luther who once said, “If all thieves who never the less do not wish to be called such were to be hanged upon the gallows. The world would soon be desolate and without both executioner and gallows.”

If you haven't yet realized, we are talking today about the Seventh Commandment, Thou Shall Not Kill. This commandment, like all of the commandments, actually, is not just an injunction against a certain type of behavior, but it is actually meant to help us to live the way God wants us to live, cultivating virtues like stewardship, contentment, and generosity. So what I want to do now is look at three Bible passages that have, in some way, to do with stealing, and discover from them how they are, in fact, teaching us how to acquire these virtues.

The first one to consider is stewardship. Psalm 24:1 reads, “The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” This simple declaration of praise from the psalmist tells us that everything belongs to God. “Everything” is pretty broad and all inclusive term. Everything includes my car, my home, my savings account, my education, my resources, and so forth. This statement has always been a common affirmation in worship services from the time of the Old Testament, because it's in worship that we remember who God is and that he owns everything.

This Psalm is basically saying: what's mine is Gods, what's yours is Gods, and what is my neighbors' is Gods too. Yet, even though it's Gods, all of it, God sees fit to entrust us, you and me, with the management of it. This is the key. We are not to steal, because everything belongs to God.

The root of all forms of stealing is being possessed by possessions. And in many ways, that is an American ideal, that we can have whatever we want if we work hard enough and/or have enough money to buy it. But that is not a Christian ideal. So how should we treat our

possessions? As followers of Jesus, God calls us to manage all of our resources, finances, ideas, education, our time, for God's glory. Once we recognize that everything we have belongs to God, then our hands are empty, and it is only then that God can use our hands for His work, ushering in God's kingdom.

But it's not easy to recognize that. What do we own and what owns us? We are a society that is obsessed with possessions. We may have titles to things like cars or homes, but do we own those things or do they own us? My parents are moving out of their home where they have lived for over 37 years. And as any of you who have experience moving may know, while it's important to have memories, and often physical memories, sometimes possessions are more of a burden than a blessing.

We are also a society that is concerned and sometimes afraid of being cheated or having something stolen from us. I heard a story told by an HMO account manager who began to notice that nearly every bill from a certain pediatrician's office included the line item "Behavior modification reinforcers."

Alarmed that the pediatrician was engaging in some unapproved, experimental psychological treatment or trying to charge for something that didn't exist, she called the physician's office to inquire, "What on earth are behavior modification reinforcers?" "Lollipops," was the reply.

Why are we so scared of being cheated? Why do we sometimes think we deserve more than we have? The fact is that God is in control, it is his right to distribute to whomsoever he will. God owns everything and yet he is happy to entrust us with earthly things for a while.

The second virtue that this commandment teaches us, after stewardship, is contentment. For an illustration of that, let's turn to Timothy 6:6-8, "But godliness with contentment is great

gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”

Part of good stewardship is contentment, and truly, we live in a world where most people do not know the meaning of contentment. Paul says that having food and clothing, with these will shall be content, but how can we when the media or other people tell us that there is always something bigger and better waiting? One of the biggest enemies of contentment, I think, is unrealistic expectations, expectations that our society tells us are perfectly normal.

When my sister was first married, she was 23, young by today’s standards, I think. She was still in seminary, she and her husband lived in on-campus housing. So they had no house of their own, one car they shared, no money, huge student loans, and he had a part time job, she had no job yet. And so of course she wanted the whole lavish wedding affairs. And she will very freely admit this now, some 13 years later, that in her situations, perhaps the money could have been used for more foundation building, but at the time, it was what every young lady was supposed to have. And of course, the most prominent gift on her wedding registry was a set of very fine china or 12 people. Even though it had to be stored in my parents’ basement because they didn’t have anyplace to put it. But that was what, she thought, people were supposed to do. And by the way, when my parents were cleaning out their house for the move, they finally returned to her the set of fine china, which was still in their basement some 13 years later.

Another enemy of contentment is, I believe, a skewed perspective. What if, instead of focusing on what we want, or even what we need, we focused, instead, on eternity. Thinking about forever instead of the here and now can certainly change our perspective on things. What does will it matter if I have a bigger house or another car or another pair of shoes 100 years from now when I’m not even around anymore. Or what does it matter if I work and work and work

just so I can have the latest gadgets if I'm too busy working to tell people around me about God's love and grace?

Stealing in all its forms, from the grandest larceny to the pettiest theft, flows from the fact that each and every human being, even the strongest of Christians, falters when it comes to fully trusting God's providence. We are insecure and our insecurity leads to greedy grasping for material things. We are insecure because of our lack of faith. God calls on us to trust Him because when we trust God, we will find contentment.

If we seek after material things we will quickly find that there is never enough. Why? Because things cannot fulfill us. The only thing that can fulfill us is a relationship with God because that is what God created us for.

There is a saying that goes, "There are two ways to be rich. One is to have or to take all you want. The other is to be satisfied with what you have." Whether we have a lot or a little of this earth's goods, we can take comfort and rest satisfied in the knowledge that God will never fail us and He has promised never to forsake us.

The final virtue that this commandment teaches us is generosity. Let's look at Ephesians 4:28, "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need."

Similarly, when explaining the 7th commandment in his Small Catechism, Luther writes, "You shall not steal. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income."

Working in order to have is very much an American ideal – work to earn, and if you earn, you are entitled to have. But again, that is not a Christian ideal. Paul makes it clear in this text

that the purpose that God has for us is not reached when we simply refrain from stealing and it is not reached when we simply work hard to possess the money we earn. Instead, Paul says the goal of God for his people is reached when they work in order to have so that they can give to those in need.

The most radical thing about this text is that we are commanded to do all our work with a view to meeting the needs of others. It doesn't matter if you have a job or not, if you like your job or not, the fact is, whatever labor we do on a daily basis can become a work of grace.

In her book, *Letters to My Daughter*, Maya Angelou writes a chapter about being generous. She says writing to someone who is generous is kind of like a preacher preaching to the already faithful choir. But she does it anyway because she says even the faithful sometimes need some encouragement. I kind of feel like that because giving is something that I think this church excels at.

So first of all, thank you. But I want to mention briefly another kind of generosity that we can all do more of and we can all do, regardless of our circumstances. In this same book, Maya Angelou writes about how she never considered herself able to be a charitable person until she went to live with her mother, a virtual stranger, at age 13. She had trouble communicating with her mother for a long while, until one day, responding to a funny face her mother made, she smiled at her mother, who suddenly began to cry. She writes, "That day, I learned that I could be a giver simply bringing a smile to another person."

We don't have to worry about anything for ourselves because God will provide. So that frees us up to worry, instead, about how to be as generous as we can to those around us, whether it's a smile, a kind word, spending time. That's what this commandment is all about. There's never a reason to steal, but there's always a reason to give more.

Small Catechism. 8th Commandment. Luke 6:31-37. **“Bloody Lip”**
Pastor David Mattson

The 8th commandment: *Thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

Martin Luther (Small Catechism) *“What does this mean? We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend them, speak well of them, and explain their actions in the kindest way.”*

Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:31-37)

Introduction: One thing I’ve learned recently is that if you’re a politician, you should probably not go on the comedy TV show, **“The Colbert Report”** – a politician was invited who was in favor of displaying the 10 Commandments in public. I’m not sure why any politician would want to go on a comedy show... But Steven Colbert, the host was also in favor of this motion... The long and the short of the interview, he asked exactly what were the 10 commandments, to name them and the politician came up with three, maybe four of the 10.

Better than arguing about where they belong in public, maybe we should first learn them... (Not that I could do any better if someone stuck a camera in my face...) So let’s review... (1-3; 4-10)

Today is the 8th commandment, trouble for everyone! One we should learn by heart... in a day where gossip is spread on the patio and at school, when half-truths and the worse possible spin is put on the internet and then forwarded to thousands of closest and dearest friends, when cyber-bullying is rampant, when politicians invoke God’s name to justify everything under the sun, when half truths and spin makers rule the day, this is a commandment for me, for you...

To get at it, I’m basically going to tell one story... True story by a friend, fellow pastor, I quote: (“Cootie Girl” by Randall Balmer)

“I remember the eyes as though it were yesterday. They were pretty. Blue. Expectant, yet afraid. “This is Diane,” one of my new fourth-grade classmates said, pointing in her direction. “Don’t let her touch you. She’s the Cootie Girl.”

“I didn’t know then—and I’m not entirely sure today—what a cootie is, but I could tell from the context that it wasn’t a good thing. Cooties, and, by extension, Diane herself, should be avoided at all costs.

“I was the new kid at Wenona School. My family had just moved to Bay City, Michigan, from the farm country of southern Minnesota. And on that first day of school, I was desperate for a friendly face amid these city kids everywhere around me.

“There was something different about Diane. My family was hardly affluent, not by any stretch of the imagination, nor were the kids at Wenona School. But the dress she wore was tattered. Her shoes appeared to have been repaired crudely and by hand. Someone whispered that she and her mother lived alone. Although she had a pleasant smile, Diane looked slightly disheveled, unkempt.

“Occasionally, the Cootie Girl would play along. After listening to taunts on that blacktop that passed for a playground in this strange new world, Diane would chase her tormenters, who would shriek in horror and run away. Anyone she tagged, boy or girl, had cooties, which, although it appeared to have no long-term effect, was not considered a good thing by the fourth-grade kids at Wenona School.

“Like a pack of wolves taunting a moose, children can devise ingenious ways to belittle anyone they choose to isolate. I recall one day standing in a line across the hallway from a janitor’s closet. One of my classmates had apparently been musing on the word “custodian” painted on the door. “Hey, look,” he shouted, moving his hands across the letters and articulating the syllables slowly: “Cus-to-Dian.”

“Everyone (laughed) at the brilliance of the put-down. But I caught the wounded look in Diane’s eyes. Yet another insult, yet another scar to carry home that night. “And where do you stand?” the eyes asked. Would the new kid become just another tormenter, or maybe, hoping against hope, a friend?

“I think I recognized even then that it was a defining moment. Are you with us, my new classmates were asking, or are you going to be a geek, a loser, an outcast like the Cootie Girl?

“Jesus fashioned an entire career out of his association with outcasts. He spent his time with harlots and tax collectors. Fishermen were hardly the elite of the first century. And when the Jewish equivalent of a lynch mob was collecting rocks to execute the adulterous woman, Jesus crouched down, scratched a few letters in the sand, and, with a few well-chosen words, dispersed the mob.

“I wish I could tell you that you that I did the right thing back there on the playground at Wenona School. We all like to be the heroes of our own stories. But I’m not very good at this hero business. I’m reasonably certain that I could never have been numbered among Diane’s worst tormenters. But sometimes—very often, in fact—silence is complicity.

“I don’t pretend that history would have been different if I had been kind to Diane, the Cootie Girl, back in Michigan nearly (four) decades ago. But I would have been different. And perhaps she as well, if only for a moment.

“I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sad and lonely, and I was wearing a ratty dress because my mother couldn’t afford anything better. But you stood up to the crowd and became my friend. If only it were so.

“I lost track of Diane long ago, although I remember her from time to time in my prayers. She never made the transition from elementary to junior high with the rest of us. Perhaps her mother found a new boyfriend or a new job. Or perhaps they decided to try a new city, to take their chances in a different school, a different community, a place where the Cootie Girl could simply be Diane, and she could start over.

“Jesus comes along and disrupts our childish games, our taunts and our sarcasm. He reminds us that he, the crucified one, was the ultimate outcast, facing the ridicule of everyone, deserted even by those who had claimed to be his friends, that he was suspended naked between earth and heaven for the benefit not only of the righteous or even the self-righteous but for the outcast.

“Jesus visits our playground and gently suggests that if we have the courage somehow to see Jesus in the Cootie Girl’s wounded blue eyes, then we will have grasped something very important about the gospel.

That’s my story, and almost my entire sermon. Now, a few quick thoughts about the 8th commandment – “Thou shalt not bear false witness...”

First, Originally this commandment was given to the people of Israel to help settle disputes, a **legal matter**, a court room matter... but of course, it’s much more than that, as Martin Luther makes it clear, the heart of this commandment, the positive side of the 8th commandment is about the power of words for good, for life, for healing, for salvation...

(High school youth going to Las Vegas...the power of your words...)

Second, The Spirit of God gives us strength to bite our tongues, to stop the gossip, to put a positive spin on people’s actions, not to gang up, but to pray up... not to hit the forward button or the send button unless we’ve talked to the person, know what’s in their heart. The Spirit of God changes words, into the life-giving Word.

And without the Spirit of God, we fail again and again... From these lips that lean negatively, I’m invited to pray. From these lips that lean towards laughing at someone else’s expense, I’m invited to pray them up. From these lips that too often are silent when I should speak of God’s amazing grace.

Third, and to these lips, I’m invited to take the cup, and hear the life-saving, life-healing, life-empowering words, blood, shed for you... That blood. On these lips. The power of a new start...

“What’s so bad about coveting, anyway?”
Pastor Sabrina Vasta

If you ever read Top 10 lists, you know they always start with the least funniest, and then the last one is the zinger, the cap, the one everyone is waiting for. I recently read this Top 10 List of Reasons to go to church: 10. It’s a good way to catch up on gossip. 9. Elvis started out in a church choir ... so can you. 8. Goodness and mercy will follow you all the rest of your life—which are better than the IRS or FBI. 7. In this economy, it might be good to be hooked up with Someone who can turn water into wine. 6. The Biblical admonition to “greet one another with a holy kiss” boosts your social life. 5. Free coffee and babysitting! 4. Robes, candles, music...and it’s less expensive than a spa. 4. There’s nothing good on TV on Sunday morning, anyway. 2. You can walk down an aisle and approach an altar without having to gain a mother-in-law. 1. Four words: all you can eat (between coffee hour, breakfast Bible studies, and Pot luck dinners, going to church is like living on a cruise ship).

God has his own top ten list, and for the past several weeks, we’ve been looking at the Ten Commandments on Sundays. So far, the list has included all the biggies. Worshiping idols – don’t do it. Murder – don’t do it. Adultery – don’t do it. Stealing – don’t do it. And now we now come to the last two of the Ten Commandments. “You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” And I can’t help but wonder, what is the big deal here? Is coveting really that bad that it deserves a place of God’s top ten list? I think I can think of a few worse things. I mean, this is something we’ve all done.

When it comes to coveting, well, we’re not only guilty of it, we’re good at it. You go to a neighbor’s house for dinner and you look around and think, “Gee, I wish I had a house like this.” Your best friend tells you about his vacation plans, and you think, “Man! I would love to have a

vacation like that.” You can call it coveting, jealousy, longing for, yearning for, craving, envy, whatever. But what’s really so bad about coveting our neighbor’s house, or your neighbor’s spouse, or maybe your neighbor doesn’t have an ox, but how about your neighbor’s car. It’s just looking. And wishing. And admiring. That’s it.

So what is the big deal? There must be a reason why God included these commandments in the laws he gave to Moses to hand down to the Israelite people. And I think here is a reason, 3 reasons, in fact. And the first one is that to covet means you are disappointed in God.

I am pretty sure that everyone has coveted at some point in their lives, but most of us would probably not admit to being disappointed in God. But that’s exactly what coveting is. When I was a little kid, I used to have a great aunt who was as sweet as could be and never had children of her own, so loved my sister and I like her own grandchildren, and was the best seamstress I have ever known... but, she loved to make us sweaters, which was fine when I was little, but as a pre-teen or teenager, her understanding of what would be cool and my understanding of what was cool were very different. I would open up the box every Christmas and say, “Oh, a sweater.”

My mother once told me that when you open a gift if first comment is to announce to the giver what the gift is, then that is a sign that you don’t like the gift. And I think she is right because I said, “Oh, a sweater,” in order to bide time to try to paste on an enthusiastic look or to come up with something to say that would sound nice, “it’s my favorite color, or how beautiful,” or something of the sort.

If you open up your life and think to yourself, oh, my life. Or I wish I had my neighbor’s life, then you are showing God that you are disappointed in God. Now everyone has bad things happen to them at some point in their lives, things caused by imperfect people and this imperfect

world in which we live, not by God. But your life, your gifts, your talents have been given to you and only you by God, and that is pretty amazing.

There as a study conducted a few years ago in *U.S. News and World Report* about the American Dream. What is the American Dream, and how do you accomplish it? The study found that if a person made under \$25,000 per year, that person felt that it would take \$54,000 a year to fulfill the American dream. Those who make \$100,000 plus crave an average of \$192,000. In other words, the American Dream usually lies nearly twice the distance away. No matter what we are given by God, we always want more, and we want what our neighbor has. We have a hard time being happy and content with where we are.

I just got back from a mission trip with the senior high youth group to Las Vegas. Perhaps you know this, but the homeless population of Las Vegas has nearly doubled in the last decade, and each year, there is a greater and greater shortage of homeless shelters in the city. Almost 12% of residents in Clark County live below the poverty line. I know that sometimes, gambling addictions or people's selfish greed can lead to problem, but I know that just as often, a bad set of circumstances, bad luck, tragedy, economic conditions can also be the factors that lead to something like homeless. And I thought to myself quite often while on this trip, but for the grace of God go I.

If we have blessings in our lives, and I think we all do, we should be on our knees thanking God every day, multiple times a day, for those many blessings. And if we face hardships, and we all also do at times in our lives, we should get on our knees and pray for God for guidance and thank God that he has never and will never abandon us. Recognizing our own blessings in one way to combat coveting. And I think one reason why not coveting is included in

the 10 Commandments is because we need to remember to thank God all the time, in all situations and circumstances for what we have been given.

The second reason I think the commandments against coveting were included is because God doesn't really care about our actions – well, maybe he does, but he is just as interested in our hearts. These two commandments are very different from the others. The other eight commandments have to do with what we do. Don't lie, don't steal, keep the Sabbath, don't worship other gods, honor our parents – they all have to do with our behavior, with our actions. Controlling our actions is not always easy, but at least it is within the realm of the possible and it is something that can be quantified. Either we murdered someone or we didn't. There is a certain accountability to the commandments built in, and when we break a commandment it is often there for others to see.

This one is a lot more nebulous. If we break the commandment against coveting, it is not on display for others to see. And besides the wrangling over whether our desires rise to the level of coveting, there is this problem of trying to control our thoughts and our attitudes in the first place. How do we do that?

There is a proverb that says: As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. So let's think to ourselves, are we setting our hearts upon the good things, or are we allowing our minds and desires to go after the wrong things?

“To covet” means “to wish to have.” That, in and of itself, isn't wrong. In fact, if we don't have wishes and goals in our life, we're probably not going to get very far. There are many earthly, as well as spiritual, things that are entirely legitimate for us to want. But the Commandments, “*You shall not covet,*” are referring to things we should not have.

Coveting is not an active sin, but it is an indicator of the condition of our hearts. It is about always wanting and desiring what does not belong to us. And when that happens, our hearts are restless because we want what we don't have. I'm sure we've all heard the saying, "Be Careful What You Wish For," which usually ends with, "because you might get it." This saying goes so far back, some say as far back as the 6th century BC. One of the earliest forms of this quote in writing was the opening line of a short horror story written in 1902 by British author W.W. Jacobs in which a couple is gifted a Monkey's Paw with great powers, power to grant them three wishes, in fact. But the previous owner begs them not to use it, saying, "Be careful what you wish for, you may receive it." And indeed, their first wish, for money, 200 pounds, is granted, but only after their son dies in a factory accident and they receive exactly 200 pounds in compensation.

That's a pretty horrific example, but the fact that this saying has been a part of human history as long as humans have been around illustrates that coveting has always been a danger to human hearts. And the fact is, we think we know what we want – want for our lives, for our future, for our loved ones, but for the most part, we really have no idea what is best for us or those around us. Mother Theresa once said, "There are more tears shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones."

There is only one who knows what is best for us, what will give us satisfaction, joy, peace, and that is God. The opposite of coveting is contentment – being satisfied with the blessings God has provided. When our hearts are content in Christ, then we are free to let go of our own petty concerns to live life and serve our neighbors.

The third reason I think the commandments against coveting were included in the big 10 is, quite simply, because God wants us to be happy. You know, I started this sermon by asking

what is the big deal about coveting? Is it really so bad that it has to be included in the Ten Commandments? What harm does it do? Does it harm your neighbor? No, not really, unless the coveting turns to action. Does it harm society? Again, not really. But it certainly does harm someone, and that someone is ourselves.

When we covet what is not ours, we take away from ourselves the opportunity to be as happy as God wants us to be. And when we are always wishing for something more, a better job, a more understanding spouse, respectful children, a little more money, more time – who doesn't wish for more time, right? – as long as we're always wishing for something else, we are wishing our lives away.

The 9th and 10th commandments are the only commandments that if you break them no one will know except for you and God. God doesn't want us to be guilty of looking well on the outside but not living well on the inside because we will always feel unwell.

The reality of our lives is that we will never ever have everything we think we want. Some of us won't look like we want to look, drive what we wish we could drive, buy what we want to buy. Personally, I would really really really like to be able to sing. But I can't. I guess I can keep a tune in a small range of notes, but that is about the best I can say for my singing. But here's another fact. We are incompletely complete. We are exactly as God means for us to be right this second.

We aren't all that we could be – we could be a lot better most of the time. And we aren't all that we should be – there is a lot of potential in this room. But we are incompletely complete. And I don't know about you, but that makes me pretty relieved. We have to work with what we've got, and I know that God is happy to work with us. Because every second of every day, God can use us to do his work, exactly as we are.

Small Catechism: Apostles' Creed—Article 1. Genesis 1:1-2:4. Psalm 8. Matthew 6:26-34.
Pastor David Mattson

Luther's Small Catechism – *What does this mean? Answer: I believe that God has created me and all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. God provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. All this God does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey God. This is most certainly true.*

Introduction: Before my wife and I were married we visited by my parents who were living at Grand Canyon National Park... Rim to rim with Kimberly... North to South, about a 6000 foot elevation change, 25 miles, but that was not the difficult part, but what made the hike hard was the 115 degree temperature! (On another trip I ate an orange, no I ate the whole orange...) Also a hike back in time... (17 million years ago...) Amazing—the Colorado River cutting its way... great shifts upward in the earth, even some marine evidence, an ocean!)

Genesis 1 – back in time... What did those original star gazers think... When the Apostles' Creed was written, when Genesis 1 was first told, when Psalm 8 was sung in the temple... Without telescopes, without a modern scientific world view, with satellites and space travel... what did they think as they looked into the night sky... (Psalm 8 and Genesis 1)

What did the cosmos look like to these people? The sky provided the farthest view. Ancient people believed that, like a blue-hued bowl, the sky protected the earth from excessive rain. And it provided a canvas to hang the stars at night. And, at some unknown point, the sky and earth met. The earth was flat... Got too close to the edge—you'd never be heard from again... Windows in the bowl, the dome, the firmament... That's the cosmology of Bible times... but that wasn't the dominant story... Other creation stories... primarily the Babylonian story... Good god, evil god, fighting... all about chaos...

In Genesis 1, it's order, rhythm... against chaos... When we recite the Apostles' Creed, read these ancient poems, reminding ourselves that God is more powerful than any chaos... Order, purpose, meaning...

1. God is more powerful than any chaos...

Sometimes the world seems chaotic... who's in charge here... walk on the beach and pray... Stare into the eyes of a newborn... Just breathe deeply and thank God for the Spirit...

2. God's in charge...

God speaks and the cosmos is created, it had to be a very large, loud explosion, God speaking... At least that's how Scripture speaks of it, that God's voice, God's Word creates... As if we needed to hear something that we're tempted to forget, the ancient poet repeats a refrain six times, at the end of each day of creation, that when God looked at His handiwork he "saw that it

was good". When God rested from His work, in a seventh and final flourish, the poet adds that God looked at His finished work and declared it "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

But we wonder sometimes, is it good? Who's really in charge? Norwegian massacre—how could this evil be allowed? Why this cancer? Why this hardship? I love what a Rabbi says about Genesis 1:

In the Eden story there is a crucial teaching for our (and every) generation: "The earth is amazingly abundant. Do not try to gobble it all." You can eat from Earth's abundance, but you cannot gobble everything. "From every tree except this one." For if you do gobble all the abundance that there is, it will vanish into poverty and lack, as it does at the end of the Garden story. (Learning from Eden: "Do not gobble the Earth!" By Rabbi Arthur Waskow | 9/8/2001)

The promise of this story, of the creation story is that God continues to speak... to work. The God who brings order out of chaos is still doing it. God is still bringing meaning and purpose to this world, because God has committed to being in relationship with it. And God is committed to you, each one of you in particular.

We begin our **baptismal service** by giving thanks and reminding one another of God's work in creation. We say, in the beginning God's spirit moved over the waters and by his Word God created the world, calling forth life in which God took delight. We retell this story, because in the waters of baptism God's Spirit once again moves over the water, calling each of us into a new life in Christ. And God takes delight in each of you. And God once again entrusts you with holy work, to live as God would live in this world. God's in charge...

Luther's explanation in "The Small Catechism" reflect this active, working, caring God who creates, preserves, protects... God's in charge...

3. Worship/Awe...

A scientist wrote the following devotion, I quote: "The magnitude of the Milky Way galaxy, let alone the universe, boggles the mind. To take a smaller example, if one were to scale down the size of the Solar System so that the Sun was the size of a tennis ball, the Earth would be the size of a grain of sand about 27 feet away. And the next nearest star to the Sun would be more than 1400 miles away! The Milky Way itself is 100,000 light years across, and is only one of billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars!" (Commentary on Psalm by Kathryn Schifferdecker)

Awe, wonder. That's what creation does... Hiking Mount Whitney... Running the hiking trails in Banff and Jasper... Swimming in Kentucky Lake... Camping in Yosemite... Hiking in Sequoia. Sailing on the ocean... Surfing... Scuba diving...

We are made in God's image. We are given a very exalted place, indeed. But we are not God. Our proper duty is to praise the Creator. It's just such a sentiment that may lie behind the obscure language of Psalm 8, verse 2: "*Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark [literally, 'strength'] because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.*" The Septuagint reads "praise" instead of "strength." In other words, praise of God guards against evil.

The praise even of infants exalts God and silences the enemy. "So long as they sing, the chaos is silenced, the meaninglessness repulsed."

"What is the chief end of man?" The Westminster Catechism famously begins. In response to The Westminster Catechism's searching question about the ultimate purpose of human life, the answer to be retained in the heart and mind of the believer is *"to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."*

The phrase "to glorify God" may seem quaint to us today... (Gloria Dei – Glory to God.) God's in charge, who will bring order our chaos... entrusted us with purpose...

Closing: Against chaos. God's in charge. Worship. Death and resurrection of Jesus...

The Apostles' Creed, as having been jointly created by the Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with each of the twelve contributing one of the articles, was already current at that time.

August 7, 2011. Small Catechism—2nd Article. John 10:22-30.

Pastor David Mattson

***Almost every Sunday at Gloria Dei, we recite the Apostles' Creed... When we recite this Creed or any Creed or any statement of faith, it usually sounds, to be honest, it doesn't sound great... Maybe it's because we say these things so regularly, you take it for granted. It sometimes sounds like a bunch of bored people, going through the motions, including the pastors.

Reciting the Creed in church, well it sounds a bit like a conversation you have with your dentist when they ask you a question and still have their hands down your mouth... 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty... Are you flossing regularly...' So this morning, since we're looking at the Apostles' Creed, the article on Jesus, at different times, I'm going to have you read it with me... So stay awake!

*** *"During a dark time in her life... a woman in my congregation complained that she had prayed over and over, "God, help me find you," ***but had gotten nowhere. A Christian friend suggested to her that she might change her prayer to, "**God, come and find me.**" *** After all, you are the Good Shepherd who goes looking for the lost sheep." She concluded when she was recounting this, "The only reason I can tell you this story is—he did." ("The Reason for God" by Timothy Keller.)*

That story from another pastor rings true to me. This morning, I want to be really personal with you this morning... there have been times when I'm tired... down... feeling anything but the "triumphant Christian" that TV religious hucksters make you feel you should be... And I would give it all up, accept with that woman, I have prayed, "God, come and find me..." The only reason I can stand before you this morning is that—He did.

***I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the virgin Mary, is **my Lord...** I emphasize "**my.**" Not in some selfish way, but because as I told you this was a personal sermon today...

One of my sisters was suicidal during her high school days... Impossible—we were the perfect family, high achievers, A students, good looking, athletic, had it together... how could this happen... During a particularly bad day in high school, after basketball practice, the head varsity basketball coach, coach Mitchell, not a "religious man." He could swear with the best of them... After basketball practice, in the locker room, I was the last kid out, he came out from his office, stopped, sat down near me on a bench and said, "David, don't worry. It will get better for your sister. I had the same trouble when I was her age."

He didn't have to say that. He didn't have to confess to a 17 year old skinny kid. But it was a moment of grace. God speaking through a stubble-faced, cigar-smoking, raspy-voiced basketball coach.

I have prayed, "**God, come and find me...**" *** The only reason I can stand before you this morning is that—He did.

*** He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and **freed me from all sins**, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.

I'm not the person I want to be. I'm not the husband I want to be. I'm not the father I want to be. I'm not the pastor I want to be.

We start our services, after singing a hymn of praise with a confession. Short. Not much. It's not required in the Lutheran church. No big brother or big Bishop is coming after us if we don't. I know a lot of churches don't dwell on that negativity... Anything that's a downer. But we do it, at least for a few seconds, because I need it.

I'm not the person I want to be. And there's something about the cross, the man on the cross, the words He speaks, the love He shows that won't let me go!

I have prayed, "**God, come and find me...**" *** The only reason I can stand before you this morning is that—He did.

And I think of our world today. So much is great. There's less violent crime today than 20, 30, 40 years ago. The kids I know are smart, funny, service-minded, faithful. Today, Gloria Dei – wow, could things be moving, happening... 7 baptisms at the 5pm service... (3 adults.) We're moving...

But there's a lot of darkness... A lot of darkness in our world.

Norway. All those kids being murdered. *Lord have mercy.*

The Horn of Africa—the starvation is staggering. Babies, children can't sit up straight anymore because of a lack of food! Can you imagine... And what are we fighting about in churches in America – sex! *Lord have mercy.*

I have prayed, "**God, come and find me...**" The only reason I can stand before you this morning is that—He did.

*** He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as **he is risen from the dead** and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.

He is risen from the dead. Our good shepherd. We celebrate the world's most hopeful, powerful, life-changing, life inspiring message of all time—Christ is risen! Each Sunday, every Sunday, we don't end with our sins, we don't end with our failings, we end with the amazing news that really is too good to believe, but with the power of the Spirit. There's hope beyond hope. There's life. All the petty rushing, worrying, fretting, buying, planning, running around that we do—Saint Paul calls that garbage, nothing next to this fact—he is risen from the dead—it'll be ok. It'll be ok.

And that's why I believe in this place, and you people—the body of Christ... you make the sign of the cross and remember all that Jesus has done for you. And then you leave this place and hope to live as Christ. We come back here next Sunday to celebrate the great news—he is risen from the dead...

Young and old. Rich and poor. And because He lives, he inspires us to do amazing things, in His name and for His children, wherever they may live...

We send children of Gloria Dei to our seminaries. We support missionaries around the world. We make sure our youth are serving the least of these. We kneel at the Communion rail which is the largest table in the world, and timeless too. All because He is risen from the dead.

We don't give up. We pray. We sing. We hope. We teach. We laugh. All because He is risen from the dead.

We go river rafting with kids... Went this past week... 20 of us... After s'mores... I told them one of my favorite Bible verses—1 John 4:18. Made them recite it. “There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear.” And then I said, ‘When you face the waves tomorrow, you might be a little nervous. Don't be afraid. When you face the waves, some of you might be a little anxious—don't be afraid.’

I concluded my sugar induced, s'mores talk by saying, ‘Of course, you know I'm not even talking about rafting, I'm talking about life—some of you are going to high school, even new schools, and some of you are going to new grades, some of you are even moving away—don't be afraid. God is with you. It'll be ok. He is risen from the dead.’

*** **Closing:** That's enough of a sermon. About Jesus. The good shepherd. The risen one. The Apostles' Creed.

One week, I was writing a sermon and the page was blank. Nothing was coming. Tired. My friend had cancer. Recurrent cancer. Despite the best medical care. Despite our prayers. And then I remember his favorite Bible verse—You guessed it. The one I taught those youth rafting. It wasn't my favorite Bible verse. It was his. “*There is no fear in love for perfect love casts out fear.*” It'll be ok. Because God came to us in Jesus, there's hope. It'll be ok.

I have prayed, “**God, come and find me...**” The only reason I can stand before you this morning is that—He did. His name is Jesus. *** Amen.

Baptism
Pastor Sabrina Vasta

Today we are talking about the sacrament of baptism. And so I want to tell you two stories about baptism, both true stories. The first story involves a baby – well, they both do, actually. This baby's parents were of mixed religions, dad Catholic, mom Protestant. The baby, it was decided by the family, would be baptized Catholic, but the Protestant mom didn't really want to have the baptism in the Catholic Church. Truth be told, she didn't really like the priest. However, theologically speaking, Catholics and Lutherans, and most Christian denominations, believe that baptizing a child has to take place in the church because part of the baptismal ceremony involves placing responsibility, not just on the parents and guardians, but also on the church members for raising the child in the Christian faith. Knowing this, the mother of the child being baptized told the priest a little white lie. She said the baby was sick and the date couldn't be changed because of the party that had been planned and the relatives coming, so the baby needed an in-home baptism. And if that wasn't bad enough, when the priest began to fuss, she told him another white lie, that a family member was a priest and would be doing the ceremony.

Then she told her Catholic husband to find another priest, one that would do this frowned upon in-home baptism and one that she would like, and one that would do it in less than a week's notice. So this Catholic father contacted some priest friends that he had, found a rather rouge priest who had just left his church and hadn't yet found a new one and who looked a lot like a hippie but was very nice and willing to bend the rules – a little too willing. So the baby was baptized at home, not in a church, by a priest who was barely a priest, in a ceremony shrouded by lies. And you know what, despite that ominous start, I turned out just fine.

My second story about baptism was told to me by one of my seminary professors. When she started out in her first call as a minister, the time came for her to do her first baptism and she was very nervous. She had a feeling everything would go wrong, and so, of course, it did. She forgot to fill up the baptismal font and ended up dumping into the font what was left in the bottom of her water bottle, barely anything at all. She mangled the prayer, she couldn't get the candle to light, so she presented a candle to the family and said, "Let your light so shine," but there was no light. But perhaps worst of all, she forgot the name of the baby, and ended up baptizing the little girl with her own name, not the baby's name. It was a complete disaster. Years later, this professor told me, that baby girl grew up and had a baby of her own and she brought that baby to my professor to be baptized because, as she said, "My baptism has had such a lasting effect on my own life, I want my little girl to have that same chance."

I guess my point to these stories is that baptismal ceremonies aren't always perfect, but the symbolism, the meaning behind the gift of the sacrament of baptism is so powerful, so strong, so full of God's grace that it cuts through the ceremony and touches the one being baptized and the ones witnessing, transforming them in ways that we will never fully understand.

That is what I want to remind us of today, the amazing gift that God extends to us in baptism, which is three-fold, I think. First of all, at baptism, we are initiated into the church. At baptism, we come into a community where we belong, where we receive love, support, and accountability. The community is both the church, but it also extends beyond that to the larger Christian community, wherever that may be.

Baptism is just the beginning of our journey in our Christian faith. Sometimes that beginning takes place when we are babies, too young to remember. Sometimes that beginning happens later in life. We had 7 baptisms at a 5:00 service a few weeks ago that included some

adults, some older children, and one baby. For each of them, that baptism marked the beginning of something new.

Radical Christian author Anne Lamott was once asked to defend requiring her 14-year-old-son go to church. She said, “We live in bewildering times and a little spiritual guidance never hurt anyone. Besides, left on their own, teenagers would opt out of many important things they don't enjoy like homework or flossing their teeth. It's good to do uncomfortable things. It's weight training for life.... God also loves teenagers who don't go to church, but such teenagers are deprived of seeing people who love God back ‘Learning to love back is the hardest part about being alive.’”

Learning to love back is living out our baptismal vows, the vows that we made when we were baptized, or that our guardians made for us, and also the vows that we take whenever we are present when someone else is baptized. That vow is to live in the knowledge that we are not our own. We are God's.

Living out our baptismal vows takes all of us. That is why baptism is an initiation into the Christian community, because we need that community and each and every single member of that community in order to live out our baptismal vows.

It takes volunteers who work in the nursery, who teach our children Sunday School, the seasoned members of the community who interact with those children and stand as examples of what a life of faith can look like.

It takes those who pray for us when we don't have the strength to pray. It takes Choir members who gather for hours upon hours so they can lead us in singing that is often more powerful than words. It takes people who are willing to visit their brothers and sisters in Christ

who are homebound, hospitalized, in nursing homes or unable to come on a Sunday so that they can maintain their connection to the faith community.

And it takes the Holy Spirit, showing up in ways we cannot expect and beyond what we can imagine.

That is God's first gift to us in baptism, initiating us into a community of fellow believers, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ so that we are not alone in this world, so that we can live out our baptismal promises, even when it's hard to do so.

The second gift that God gives us in baptism is that we are united with Christ. In his Small Catechism, Luther writes that what baptism gives is this: "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." Wow, that is some powerful sacrament, isn't it?

Our baptism unites us to Jesus and His baptism, and what Jesus sacrificed for our salvation. As Paul writes in Romans 6, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

This union to Jesus Christ happens through Baptism. This is why Jesus, as He is about to ascend into heaven, does not command His disciples to go and crucify all nations, or to resurrect all nations, but to baptize all nations.

It is said that whenever Martin Luther felt drained or empty or felt that his faith was fading, he would simply write on a blackboard these words: "I have been baptized" — a simple declaration of the Lord's permanent hold on his life.

For that same reason, Martin Luther used to say to people, particularly people who were facing a difficult situation or a morally ambiguous situation, “*Remember your Baptism*”. It is a reminder that it is not enough to simply ask “What do I want out of my life?” We must go on to ask, “What does God want out of my life?”

In baptism, we celebrate a ritual, but it is such an important ritual whereby we are incorporated into God’s plan of salvation for the whole world. And that gift of salvation cannot be undone by anything we might do or neglect to do. It is given to us as gift, not because we are good, but in spite of the fact that we aren’t because God is merciful and loving.

In baptism God’s grace flows out in so many ways. First, we are initiated into the Christian community. Second, we are united with Christ and incorporated into God’s saving grace. And third, we are given new birth through water and the Spirit. In his Small Catechism, Luther addresses the question of how water can do such things as forgive us our sins, deliver from death and the devil, and give us eternal salvation. He writes this, “It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water and no baptism. But with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost.”

So lest we put too much faith in human ritual, remember the stories I began with of the two not-so-theologically correct baptisms. Luther was clear that while faith is important, baptism does not depend on faith. Baptism does not become invalid if it is not properly received because it is not bound to our faith, which changes and grows and sometimes even wavers, which is okay. Instead, baptism is bound to two unwavering things, water and the Word.

As Paul writes in Galatians 3, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Clearly, it’s all God; there is nothing that we do to earn this new life. However, we are changed in our baptism, we are given responsibilities as children of God, and we can certainly go forward as new people. That doesn’t just happen in our baptism, though, it happens every day of our Christian life. Martin Luther always said that each day is an opportunity to die to sin and rise to new life.

Fred Craddock once told a story about a man that he met when he was a young pastor, who was a committed nonchurchman. He would always say, “I work hard, I take care of my family and I mind my own business. I have no need of the Church.”

Years later, this nonchurch-goer had a change of heart and wanted to be baptized by that pastor. In their conversation, the pastor said, “Remember what you used to say to me all the time back then, that you work hard, that you take care of your family and you mind your own business. Do you still say that?” And the man answered, “Yes, that’s what I believe in.” So the pastor asked, “Well, what’s the difference now?” The guy thought for a minute and said, “I didn’t know what my business was back then. Now I do.”

When we remember our baptism, we remember that we are not first and foremost our own individual self, we are united with Christ and united with the whole body of Christ. And as such, we are given business to do: to ease the suffering of those around us, to build community, and lift up one another in love. That is a pretty amazing sacrament.

Holy Communion. John 6:48-56. Exodus 16:9-21. 1 Corinthians 11:17-26.

Introduction: Begin by telling a story I've used before, about 7 years ago in worship, more recently in a Bible study, but it's perfect for today, when we're thinking about Holy Communion... It's by Lutheran pastor Walt Wangerin... ("Lookin' For Jesus, in All the Wrong Places")

Early in my childhood I suffered a spiritual crisis. I can't remember now how early this was, but I was young enough to crawl beneath the church pews, small enough to be hauled back up by my mother one-handed, yet old enough to wish to see Jesus. I wanted to see Jesus with my own eyes. But I was also child enough to admit that I never truly had seen my Savior face to face. Never.

That was my crisis. Every Sunday everyone else who gathered for worship seemed to so completely at ease that I was convinced that they had seen God in His house. Everyone, that is, but me. They sang without distress. They prayed without anguish, and I stared with envy into their peaceful faces. It was a party to which I alone had not been invited.

I wanted desperately to see Jesus strolling down some aisle in a robe and rope and sandals, eating a sandwich maybe, since I would catch Him off guard, just being himself. I spent all the time between Sunday school and worship peeking into every room, the pastor's study, the roaring boiler room, seeking the signs of his presence. Nothing. I wanted to see Jesus.

Do you think he'd hide from me? Well, I knew he knew his house better than I did. He could hide. Do you think I made him mad by some sin I couldn't even remember now? I tried with all my might to remember. But I couldn't remember one that bad. As soon as I thought of it, I was right ready to confess and be forgiven. Until then I tried to surprise the Lord in hiding. During services I would slip down from the pew to the floor and peer among ankle-bones and pant-cuffs. So then, that's when my mother hauled me one-handed high on to the pew seat again and clapped me to her side with an iron grip.

She's a very, very strong woman, my mother. You don't cross her. But my yearning increased to a panic: I wanted to see Jesus!

Why was Jesus avoiding me? Why did He take flight whenever I came near? Couldn't I see Jesus too? Which room had I never checked? Was there any such room in the church? Was there somewhere all the rest of the saints made sure I didn't see? Yes!

Oh, my yes! Yes! There was indeed one room into which I had never gone, nor ever so much as peeped—a sanctum of terrible mystery and terrible charm. It horrified me to think of actually entering the place. It tightened my loins and made me sweat all week long, every time I contemplated venturing to that door. But I would. I wanted to Jesus, and I was convinced that this room did above all rooms qualify for a Holy of Holies. Surely he was in that place, where, if a boy came in unworthily, he would die on the spot.

And so it came to pass that on the following Sunday morning I wagered my entire life on the chance that I knew where the Son of God lurked. That is to say, I risked my mother's wrath.

During the sermon I flat slipped from the pew, ducked her reach, skipped down the aisle and tiptoed downstairs to the Dangerous Door, the Room of Sweet Folly and Holy Violence.

Breathless, I approached the Women's Restroom.

Then I knocked. I nudged the door inward. "Jesus? Are you in there, Jesus? Jesus"

So then, my life was over. Nothing mattered any more. I was so hopeless when I returned to my mother in her pew that I felt no fear of punishment. She could do to me as she pleased, and it would mean absolutely nothing. Jesus wasn't there. Mirrors and wide tables and weird smells were there there; but the King of Creation did not dwell in the Women's Restroom. Mom could kill me for all I cared. I had looked in the last place, and the last place was empty. There was no more.

Well, my mother didn't kill me. She froze me with a glance, beautiful and severe: Just wait young man. She pointed to the front where the pastor in black was intoning: This cup is the New Covenant in my blood..." Blood. I guess my mom was indicating an ominous future for me. So what? What did I care?

Do this in remembrance of me," said the gaunt, white, ghostly preacher, and then people began to move forward, pew by pew. They sang and they filed up the aisle. My mother got up. She walked forward with them. I had seen it all before, but it never had an effect on me. I was stunned by what my mother proceeded to do. In strange humility this strong woman knelt... She bowed her head, and then like a child, she raised her face.

My mother can handle black bears in the Rockies—and my mother can surely handle herself, but now, meek, humble, she accepted a cracker. Then a little drink. She sipped. My mighty mother, brought so low, kneeling! What power could have stricken her so?

Yet, when she came floating back down the aisle and into our pew, there was nothing of defeat in her face. There was a softness rather, a private smiling. She was different.

She smelled different too, a rich red odor. When she sat and bowed her head to pray, I stuck my nose near her, whence came this scent of urgent mystery. She felt my nearness and drew back. "Mama," I whispered, "what's that?" "What's what?" She asked. "That smell. What do I smell?" "What I drank," she said.

I wanted to pull her jaw down and look into her throat. "No, but what is it? What's inside of you?"

"Oh, Wally," she shrugged, reaching for a hymnal, "that's Jesus. It's Jesus inside of me."

Jesus? I stared at her. Her profile, her narrow nose, her perfectly even brow all suffused with a scent of bloody sweetness. So, that's where Jesus has been all along. In my mama!

Who would have guessed that this was the room where the Lord most chose to dwell? In my mama. Strong woman, meek woman, a puzzle for sure.

Well, I clapped my own small self smack to her side, and took her arm and wrapped it around me to be closer, and we sang, and I grinned. We sang, "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation..." ...in blood, in a rich red smell, in the heart of my mama. Amen! (from "Little Lamb Who Made Thee?")

That's my long introduction and now for a few quick points about Holy Communion... (1 Corinthians 11.17-34) There are basically three instructions given by Saint Paul:

Look Back. Paul begins by pointing out that he is not passing on to them something new, something that he made up... But he is passing on to them something that he received from the Lord. There's actually a word play in this verse. Paul literally says "*I passed on to you...on the night that Christ passed on...*" He wants them to fully appreciate and understand the significance of the meal which they participate in, it's about the cross.

We remember the past, especially Jesus' death on the cross, and the Holy Spirit gives it spiritual power in the present.

Look back, we remember, Jesus' work on a cross. Body. Blood. That is God! If Christ loves you to death, why worry about all those things that tear you down... We look back for strength... we remember the miraculous cross...

Look Forward. Verse 26. '*We proclaim his death until he comes again.*' Saying that during Holy Communion... In looking forward to his return we proclaim that he is not dead but risen from the grave, death has been defeated and the grave conquered for all who believe and trust in him. In celebrating Holy Communion we reaffirm our belief in his resurrection, that because he is risen from the dead we too will one day be raised from the dead. So in Holy Communion we not only look back to the cross we also look forward to his return and the great resurrection, reunion.

Break in our Communion rail... That's for the saints, those who have died, those have died in faith, parents, grandparents, loved ones who have run the race... It's really an unbroken circle... "May the circle be unbroken."

Look forward in Holy Communion, this is but a foretaste of the feast to come, a great reunion, resurrection, a hopeful meal...

Look around... The church I grew up in... you never looked around...

Last week water bottles in church! Sacrilege... But we never would look around... At this table... you see the person across... you line up down the aisle, wait your turn... it's hard not to look around...

I think this passage has been so misinterpreted, to get yourself ready, inside, to focus on your own sins, shortcomings... and yes, there's a part of self-examination. But what Saint Paul is

actually reminding them to look around. The Corinthians were pigs! Some were hoarding, selfishly eating the entire potluck, while others, slaves, working hard all day for their only meal would show up and nothing! Starving...

Part of Saint Paul's emphasis here about Holy Communion is that you're looking inside, internally focused too much, you're too focused on yourself—start looking around...Don't forget the hungry... Who is missing? Neighbors? Friends? Co-workers...

You be the sacrament to them... A sign of God's grace... You are the body of Christ. Until they say, like that little boy: *Who would have guessed that this was the room in the house of the Lord where the Lord most chose to dwell?*

Conclusion: Look Back. Look Forward. Look Around. Like that little boy Wally, you will see Jesus, God's mercy incarnate, in the most peculiar of places.

(idea about points from "Holy Communion" by Alan McCann. Sermoncentral.com).

“Your Kingdom Come... I think”
Pastor Sabrina Vasta

Not too long ago, a very good friend of mine called me on the phone and spoke to me quite frankly about how she experienced anger and disappointment with God because of the suffering she had experienced – which was significant – in her life. After we talked for a while, I asked her, “Have you talked to God about this?” She said, “Of course not.” She had been raised in a Christian church, a very formal church. “You’re not supposed to talk to God like that.” But as soon as she said it, she kind of laughed because she knew how silly how silly that sounded. Then she said, “I guess he already knows.” And I said, “Yes, but if that’s what’s on your heart, that’s what your prayers need to be about.”

When I was visiting my family in New Jersey for vacation this summer, I put my niece and nephew to bed a few times while staying with them. And so I got to hear their prayers. And they were wonderful prayers. They prayed for mom and dad, for other family members, they told God stories of what happened to them that day, they sang songs to God, they asked for more fun things to happen the next day. So informal, so conversational, so unassuming, so real. I think we can often learn a thing or two from children’s prayers.

In fact, most of us could probably always use a little help with our prayer lives. The disciples were in the same boat before Jesus taught them about prayer. But they watched Jesus and they saw the connection between private prayer and public power and they asked him, “Teach us to pray.”

What would happen, do you think, if we asked Jesus, “Teach me to pray?” When the disciples made that request, Jesus gave them what we call the Lord’s Prayer. It is a model prayer. That’s certainly the way Martin Luther took it. When Luther’s barber asked for help in prayer, Luther wrote him a long letter in response, writing, “I regard the Lord’s Prayer as the best of

prayers. Indeed, it turns out that it was composed and taught by the real Master. What a pity it is that such a prayer by such a Master should be babbled and gabbled so thoughtlessly throughout the world.”

Luther encouraged his barber to use it as a model, saying one phrase at a time, then allowing the Spirit to help him fill in the rest.

Like the Apostles Creed, the Lord’s Prayer is something we say a lot, at least every Sunday, but also like the Creed, it might not be something we put a lot of thought into – at least, not anymore. It might be something we say automatically, from memory, without much consideration into the meaning of what we’re praying for. But not Luther. In his Small Catechism, Luther takes this prayer line by line, explaining what is meant by each petition of his prayer. And if you really read through Luther’s teachings, you might actually be surprised by some of what you read. Am I really praying for that? Do I really want to be praying for that? Wait just one minute here.

Take, for instance, the second and third petitions, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We pray this every week, but do we really want the kingdom of God to come on earth, for God’s will to be done? What exactly are we asking for when we pray this phrase of the Lord’s Prayer?

When we pray this part of the prayer, we need to be aware, we need to be careful because this is a prayer that goes against our very nature. When we pray this part of the prayer, we are actually asking for change, for God to change us and for God to change our world. What? But we don’t like change. Change is scary. But nevertheless, when we pray this prayer we are asking for radical, life altering, world altering, us altering change.

So we better look out. We better be on the watch because if there's one thing we know about God, it's that God listens to and answers prayers.

So what do I mean we are asking God to change our world? When explaining how God's Kingdom will come and God's will will be done in his *Small Catechism*, Luther writes this, "When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end."

God is going to break the counsel and will of this world and of our flesh. Uh-oh. That already doesn't sound good. "Your Kingdom come?" I don't know about that. I'm pretty comfortable in this world with all its comforts and conveniences, where things are ordered the way they're supposed to be ordered. The last aren't first. No, here on earth the first are first. It just makes sense. Here on earth, the meek don't inherit anything. No, those with the loudest voice, the most influence, the biggest bank accounts inherit everything here. Here on earth, if someone hits my right cheek, I'd call the police, not willing turn my other cheek to get hit, as well. Here things make sense.

In the kingdom of God, they don't. The last are suddenly the first? What's up with that? The ones who are the most blessed aren't the rich and powerful but the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker and the persecuted. What kind of kingdom is this?

In the book of Revelation, there is a vivid description of the kingdom of God descending from heaven and being established on earth. This is a wonderful vision, but we need to ask, but the Kingdom of God is not just a future occurrence; it is also here and now. Jesus talked about the presence of the Kingdom of God all the time. In Luke 17, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God

is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

God's kingdom is in us. After the resurrection, Jesus breathed on his disciples and they received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings God's kingdom into our lives. Wherever God is present and God rules is where God's kingdom is located. As Luther wrote in his Small Catechism, "The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also."

But what is the Kingdom of God here on earth? Jesus uses parables to describe the Kingdom, that it starts as small as a mustard seed and is hidden like yeast. These parables suggest that the kingdom is a reality *before* it comes in a powerful and dramatic way. In addition to being a future reality, it has reality right now. So what does it look like?

There is no real clear definition in the Bible, is there? I am in the middle of reading a book that I highly recommend called, *Treasures in Clay Jars*. One of the contributing authors was my theology professor at Princeton. This book gives an account of nine Christian communities, mission communities, in North America that are living stories of what living the kingdom on earth looks like.

These are all different kinds of churches of different denominations, sizes, locations. So what is clear is that there is no one way, no formula. What is in this book are stories, stories of mercy, of justice, of loving God and neighbors in a manner that goes beyond any way that a dry theological description of what the kingdom should look like could ever go.

So what does the kingdom of God look like? I don't know. But I guess if we start telling and listening to stories of how others have engaged with the kingdom, have helped to bring God's Kingdom closer to earth, then we will begin to see the awesome complexity of God's

work in this world and the variety of ways to live out the Christian faith when it comes to participating with God's kingdom.

When we pray, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done," we are praying, first, for God to change our world, as uncomfortable as that might be. And second, perhaps even more radical, we are praying for God to change us. Your will be done? Wait a minute. I'm not sure about that. I kind of like it better when my will is done.

We begin the Lord's Prayer with hallowing God's Name, then asking for His Kingdom rule in our lives, so this is obviously not a self-centered prayer. But when we get to the part about God's will being done, how much of this is just lip service? How often are we really thinking God's will be done, as long as it lines up with my will?

Prayer is such a natural response to whatever is going on in our lives. We want to reach out to God, in thanksgiving, in supplication, in need. But while prayer is a natural thing, praying for God's will to be done is as unnatural as surrendering our lives, our wants and wishes and wills, to someone else. We readily cry out in our need but we do not so readily give up what we want.

Sometimes praying, "Your will be done," is the most difficult prayer we could possibly pray. It seems so simple, but this is actually a very advanced prayer. It takes time and experience and maturity to learn to pray "your kingdom come, your will be done," and it does not come easily if it happens at all. Because we are asking for God to change our way of thinking.

But when we understand that God always has our best in mind, that's when those 4 words "Thy will be done!" become a source of extreme peace and comfort in our lives because we know that God is with us and He will never leave us or forsake us.

Despite what we say, most of the time what we want is for *our* will to be done, and the worst thing God could do at such a time might be to give us precisely what we want. Thankfully, God's answers are wiser than our prayers. Prayer is not a tool for getting-it is a means of becoming, becoming closer to God and becoming what God has intended for us. It's fine to let God know our needs, but then we trust Him to decide how to respond.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven," we have to understand that this is a radical, dangerous prayer. It lets God loose in us and in the world and in us to make changes.

I want to end this sermon by reading from a devotional by Teresa Vowell about prayer. Lest we think that our saying the Lord's Prayer or any prayer doesn't really matter, listen to what Vowell writes:

They say that prayer changes things, but does it REALLY change anything?
Oh yes! It really does!

Does prayer change your present situation or sudden circumstances?
No, not always, but it does change the way you look at those events.

Does prayer change your financial future?
No, not always, but it does change who you look to for meeting your daily needs.

Does prayer change shattered hearts or broken bodies?
No, not always, but it will change your source of strength and comfort.

Does prayer change your wants and desires?
No, not always, but it will change your wants into what God desires!

Does prayer change how you view the world?

No, not always, but it will change whose eyes you see the world through.

Does prayer change your regrets from the past?
No, not always, but it will change your hopes for the future!

Does prayer change the people around you?
No, not always, but it will change you - the problem isn't always in others.

Does prayer change your life in ways you can't explain?
Oh, yes, always! And it will change you from the inside out!

So does prayer REALLY change ANYTHING?
Yes! It REALLY does change EVERYTHING!

Small Catechism—Lord's Prayer 2. "**P-P-Perfect Prayer**" Luke 11:1-8.
Pastor David Mattson

Introduction: *While on vacation, I had the opportunity to go camping a few times... most recently with 16 girls, including my daughter, 16 girls from the Dana Hills High School Tennis Team. A few of them had never been camping...*

Camping teaches many things... primarily had we take for granted modern conveniences... like a soft bed, a hot shower, flush toilets...

It's amazing what we take for granted... Maybe that's enough of a sermon today—pause, reflect, thank God for relationships... opportunities... shelter... food... bed... It's amazing what we take for granted...

The same thing could be said about the Lord's Prayer. It's amazing what you miss in this simple prayer if you don't study it... it's amazing what you take for granted... All encompassing, says it all, covers it all... (Opening Prayer.)

Pardon for yesterday. Provision for today. Protection for tomorrow.

Forgive us our sins - Pardon for yesterday.

God is ready to forgive, to help, to empower, to pick us up, to lead us on. God is ready to perform that miracle of costly grace that wipes clean, that gives hope, that brings to life where before all there was death... Forgiveness is at the center of who God is... we know this because of Jesus.

Does the name Steve Bartman mean anything to you? No? How about if I add the information, Wrigley Field, October 14, 2003? Ahhh, that lit up some light bulbs for the nation's die-hard Cub's fans. 2003. The Cubs had a real, actual chance of getting to the World Series. The last time they had been there was 1945. The last time they brought home the pennant was 1908. Now the Cubs were in Game 6 of the National League Championships. They were ahead in games, 3 to 2. They were ahead in this particular game as well. A few more outs and they were headed for the World Series.

Luis Castillo of the Marlins was at bat. He hit a fly ball that went foul. Even so, the Cubs outfielder raced to get it, he almost jumped into the stands to get it. But fan, Steve Bartman, touched that ball. Castillo ended up walking and the Marlins collected seven runs before the inning was over. The Marlins won the game that day and the next, as well. And Steve Bartman? A lifelong Cubs fan, for his own safety was escorted from the stands by a cordon of security. In the next days, the Governor of Illinois suggested Bartman ought to get a new identity like they do in the witness protection plan and the Governor of Florida offered him asylum. As many as six Chicago police squad cars encircled his home to keep his house and family safe.

And Steve Bartman, good husband, good Little League coach, good guy, and good fan... Steve ended up writing an apology in which he said he regretted what had happened and he was "truly

sorry." I'm sure Steve Bartman, if he had a chance to relive that day, would decide to act differently.

Almost all of us have days like that... days when we regret what we've done... or what we should have done. Days when we wish we could have a do-over... days when we whisper to ourselves "if only I knew then what I know now." Days when we think, "If I had a chance to do it over, I woulda, shoulda, coulda done things differently."

Forgive us our sins—Pardon for yesterday. There's no need to beat ourselves up, for God will pick you up. No need to tear yourself down, because God will put you back together. No need to worry about wringing out an ounce of mercy for any mistake because mercy and forgiveness is at the center of God's heart. We know this because of Jesus.

Pardon for yesterday. **Provision for today.**

"Give us today our daily bread." This prayer request teaches us that everything we have comes from God. Everything. The clothes, the food, the friendships, the education, the mind we use, the words we speak, everything comes from God.

As one unknown poet put it: Back of the loaf is the snowy flour And back of the flour, the mill And back of the mill is the field of wheat The rain and the Father's will

Everything of value that you possess comes in one way or another from the hand of Almighty God. Everything you have at this moment, including the very breath you are breathing, comes down as a gift of the Father of lights above.

A few years ago I happened to catch a few minutes of an interview with Hamilton Jordan, Chief of Staff under President Carter. Jordan wrote a book with the intriguing title, No Such Thing as a Bad Day. It's his own story about being diagnosed with cancer on three separate occasions before the age of 50. "Where did the title come from?" asked the interviewer. Hamilton Jordan said he called a friend with cancer who is also a father with several young children. After they chatted for a bit, Mr. Jordan asked him, "Are you having a bad day?" "When the doctors tell you that you have only three months to live, there is no such thing as a bad day," the man replied.

Life is too short to have a bad day... A "bad day" is a luxury we give ourselves because we figure with so many years to go, we can pout or be miserable or have a pity party or feel sorry for ourselves today. Only the spiritually blind dare to go into the corner and sulk.

The lesson is not about praying before a meal. The lesson is about being truly grateful to God for all of his blessings.

"Give us today our daily bread." As someone said, "We are invited to ask for bread, not for cake. We are to pray "give us today our daily bread," not "our daily dessert." Jesus encourages us to pray to God for our needs, not for our greeds."

Give us this day our daily bread... An awareness... that's hard when our eyes are staying down at the floor, at the problems surrounding and threatening to choke, but still, daily bread... Creates an awareness, a gratitude... for all that God has provided...

(Life is uncertain. Most of us don't have enough savings to get through another month. You can be doing fine and then one day the doctor says, "I'm sorry the tests are positive." Your life gets rearranged in a split second. Just when you think you've got it all together, an illness, the loss of a job, the collapse of an empire that you put together, can happen so fast. And yet, still God provides, day by day.

Life is uncertain. But underneath, the hands of God, underneath it all, the cross and the resurrection, meaning God will find a way.

Give us today our daily bread. At its heart, this is a prayer for food, to be said before you sit down and eat. When was the last time you actually prayed to God, "O God, please give me a meal?" Most of us ought to pray the opposite, "O God, prevent me from eating another meal, I've already eaten too much." Acknowledging that God provides, day by day.)

Pardon for yesterday. Provision for today. And finally, **protection for tomorrow.**

Save us from the time of trial... Some of us can't but help say the Lord's Prayer using the older English words, "*lead us not into temptation...*"

In Greek, the word for trial, testing, temptation—same word, so we have to decide what word fits better, the King James version chose "temptation." So people prayed to God not to tempt them for about a hundred years... Even though we know that doesn't make sense, it's not scriptural, and it's just, well odd, if you think about it...

For example, if you're a parent or a child... And you kept saying to your dad or mom, over and over, 'don't hurt me.' The first time, the parent would look at their child and say, 'well of course I won't hurt you.' But what if the child kept say it... Talking about testing a parent's patience... They might say to their child... enough already, I love you, I'm not going to lead you into temptation, you can move on already!

Save us from the time of trial. What God promises in this prayer is protection. Save us. No more important prayer. And notice, it's not just about me... It's us... I'm praying for every person. This prayer imparts a bigness, a vastness, a broadness to your prayers. It takes you out of the narrow focus of your own problems and it opens you up. That all would come to know God's amazing grace...

I mentioned camping... A couple of girls didn't know how to make a "S'more." Never had a s'more before... For those whose idea of camping is a hotel room, a "S'more" is a marshmallow roasted over an open fire, add a piece of chocolate bar, graham crackers, make a sandwich, and enjoy... Of course they loved them. Didn't know what they were missing! My idea of a s'more is you remove the graham cracker, throw the marshmallow, and you eat the chocolate!

Like a S'more, but more so... we want everyone to have the experience of Jesus... Jesus came to destroy death. I believe that's the first reason Jesus came. Not first to teach. Not first to heal what ails you. He died and He rose again. The first one through. To bring us home. We say "us" because we want everyone to know this most amazing prayer, this most amazing Savior, this most amazing gift.

Pardon for yesterday. Provision for today. Protection for tomorrow.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have given us everything... pardon for yesterday, provision for today, protection for tomorrow... And now we ask for one more thing: a grateful heart. Amen.