



March 1, 2017
Ash Wednesday
The First Commandment

“Do you have the kind of heart that expects from [God] nothing but good, especially in distress and want, and renounces and forsakes all that is not God? Then you have the one true God.”

--Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*

Read Psalm 121

A little boy came home from Sunday School. Mom was cooking lunch. "Mommy, is it true that before you're born you're just dust and after you die you go back to being dust?" She tipped her head, "That's right son, why?"

"Well," he replied, "That's just what they said at church today."

"Run upstairs and wash your hands son, lunch will be ready in a few minutes." About 10 minutes went by and she called out, "Lunch is ready!"

"In a minute!" he shouted down the stairs. As they were about to sit down at the table, the little boy asked, "Is that dust to dust thing really true?"

"Yes, dear," Mom replied, "I believe it is."

"Then you better get up to my room pretty quick, because something under my bed is either coming or going!"

"Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." We hear those words at our Ash Wednesday worship services. We are reminded that we are mortal—subject to the powers of sin, death and the Devil. We wear crosses of ash on our foreheads to carry that reminder to the world. We are not God.

Today we meditate on the First Commandment. "*You shall have no other gods.*" This is the "flip side" of remembering that we are dust. God is God, and we are not. And that is the good news! Martin Luther explains that First Commandment in this way. "*We are to fear, love and trust God above all things.*" The First Commandment sets the stage for the other nine commandments. The First Commandment is the platform for the whole Catechism.

God is God, and we are not. And that is the good news. We may be dust, but we are lively dust. We are made in the image and likeness of God. Our vocation is not to replace God but rather to reflect God's image into the world. That is more than enough glory for us.

Martin Luther lays out our relationship with God in his Large Catechism. "What does it mean to have a god?" he asks. "*To have a god,*" he answers, "*is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart.*" That is what it means to have faith.

"My help comes from the LORD," we read in Psalm 121, "who made heaven and earth." Faith means trusting in God to keep us from all evil, to keep our life (Psalm 121:7). Our God promises to keep "*your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.*"

Obeying the First Commandment means trusting our God to keep us both coming and going.

Let's pray. Dear God, send your Holy Spirit into my heart today to create the gift of faith. Fill me with fear, love and trust in You above all things. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do something: Make a list today of all the things in your life that try to take God's place in your heart.

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