



March 3, 2017
The Third Commandment

“How does this sanctifying take place? Not when we sit behind the stove and refrain from external work, or deck ourselves with garlands and dress up in our best clothes, but...when we occupy ourselves with God’s Word and exercise ourselves in it.”

--Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*

Read Hebrews 10:19-25

I like to fish, although I don’t take nearly enough time to do it. So it pains me to run across this meme on social media: “It’s better to be in a boat thinking about God than to be in church thinking about fishing.” I suppose that’s all well and good if my relationship with God is just about thinking.

But it’s not.

“Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy,” says the Third Commandment. We humans certainly have a great need for rest and reflection time in this hyper-stimulated, hyper-active culture. Taking a weekly Sabbath from our work (and perhaps from video screens and news outlets and shouting heads) would do a great deal to calm our anxious hearts.

But that’s not what this commandment is about according to Luther. “We are to fear and love God,” he writes in the Small Catechism, “so that we do not despise preaching or God’s word...” Our time in worship weekly is an opportunity to be present to God’s Word and to let the Gospel work on our anxious and angry hearts. That won’t happen in a bass boat, on a soccer field or in a bookstore. Christians do better when we meet together around God’s Word.

“And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,” we read in Hebrews 10:24-25, “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” We gather to let the Gospel work on us together. Then we encourage one another to put that Good News to work.

This is the positive part of this commandment. Keeping the Sabbath holy, Luther writes, means that we do not neglect God’s word “but instead keep that word holy and gladly hear and learn it.” Fishing is a great thing, but it’s no substitute for worship—at least not for Christians who long to have a deeper relationship with our Lord and his Church.

During Lent we commit to extra worship services beyond Sunday morning in order to deepen our faith and our reflection on the Good News of the Gospel. This year those extra, midweek services focus on Luther’s Small Catechism and our life of faith. I hope you plan to attend those services at our church or another congregation. Please see our website for details: www.emanuelcb.org.

Regular worship attendance anchors you in the Gospel and in the community of faith. Hearing the word works on your heart. Receiving the sacrament of the altar feeds you with grace. Take every chance you can to take advantage of these benefits!

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. And invite someone to worship with us this week!

Pastor Lowell Hennigs
Emanuel Lutheran Church
2444 N Broadway
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503-0499
www.emanuelcb.org