



March 4, 2017
The Fourth Commandment

“Young people must therefore be taught to revere their parents as God’s representatives, and to remember that, however lowly or poor they may be, they are their own father and mother, given them by God. They are not to be deprived of their honor because of their failings. Therefore, we are not to think of their persons, whatever they are, but of the will of God.”

--Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*

[Read Romans 11:1-6](#)

We live in a time when there is a strong desire to “burn it all down.” That anarchism comes from both the left and the right ends of our political spectrum. We Lutherans have a deep and historic suspicion of such anarchism. Luther witnessed the deaths of a hundred thousand peasants when his words about Christian freedom were taken to mean that all authority should be attacked and destroyed. Faced with insurrection, the nobles and knights responded with intolerable cruelty.

My father liked an old proverb: “Any jackass can kick down a barn but it takes a good carpenter to build one.” Well, Dad was a good Lutheran! We trust that the God of justice and love creates order and expects human authorities to maintain that order with love. That’s the heart of this commandment.

Authority, however, is given for serving others—not for serving self. Note these words from the *Large Catechism*. “Everybody acts as if God gave us children for our pleasure and amusement, gave us servants merely to put them to work like cows or asses, and gave us subjects to treat them as we please, as if it were no concern of ours what they learn or how they live.” In fact, authority creates greater responsibility and a higher level of accountability to God.

One of the ways to observe this commandment is to honor our “fathers and mothers” in the faith. Our Christian tradition has a special relationship with Judaism. We share history, books, beliefs and...worship of the Creator of the Universe.

We have spent many centuries not only dishonoring our Jewish forebears but instead seeking to actively destroy them. Martin Luther bears significant responsibility for such hatred of the Jews. He wrote terrible, hateful tracts about the Jews later in his life. These words have been used to justify the Holocaust, for example. In 1994, the ELCA issued a formal apology to our Jewish mothers and fathers and pledged “never again.” <http://elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Jewish-Relations>

Yet we find ourselves in a time of renewed anti-Jewish rhetoric and activity. Synagogues receive bomb threats. Jewish cemeteries are vandalized. The halls of power shelter not only whispers but now “normal conversations” about “Jewish problems.” **It shall not be so among us.**

So we honor our parents of all kinds, and treasure our children as the gifts they are.

Let’s pray. Dear God, give us your Holy Spirit so that we will neither despise nor anger our parents and others in authority. Instead, lead us to honor and respect them and to call them to carry out their God-given vocations of service. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Do something: Send a letter, card or email of thanks to a public servant this week. And send a letter, card or email to a public servant urging that person to be faithful in serving the public good.

<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/contacts> (helpful information for making contacts with Iowa legislators).

Please also see the statement by ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton responding to attacks on Jewish community centers: <http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7874>.

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