

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Lent is a season of repentance as we reflect on why our Lord died on the cross for us. But Lent is also about catechesis, because Lent is a catechetical season.

When one thinks about *Luther’s Small Catechism*, one often thinks of the Six Chief Parts: (1) The Ten Commandments, (2) The Creed, (3) The Lord’s Prayer, (4) Baptism, (5) Confession, and (6) the Sacrament of the Altar. That is usually where one stops. Six Chief Parts. Good to go!

But what if I told you that there were sections at the very end of *Luther’s Small Catechism* that often goes unnoticed. Did you notice that something was missing? Well, at the conclusion of the Small Catechism, Luther places three more sections: Daily Prayers, The Table of Duties, and Christian Questions with Their Answers.

When I went through catechesis – that first time when I grew up in the ELCA, I thought this pamphlet contained the entire Luther’s Small Catechism. But upon further inspection, this pamphlet did not contain the Table of Duties and Christian Questions with Their Answers. However, I can give Augsburg Fortress a pass on one of them, since Christian Questions with Their Answers was not published until after Luther’s Death. But I do find it rather odd omitting the Table of Duties.

But I can’t just go after the ELCA, since the LCMS hasn’t been perfect in including the entirety of the Small Catechism either. Although the LCMS has always included the Table of Duties in its publication of the Small Catechism, it has not always been included in our hymnals.

In my research through my LCMS hymnals, the first hymnal to include the Small Catechism was not the beloved red TLH, but the blue Lutheran Worship, but even with that publication, the *Table of Duties* was missing. Thanks be to God that the maroon LSB has included the entirety of the Small Catechism.

Beginning tonight and throughout these Lenten Midweeks we will look at that second of the last three parts of the Small Catechism: The Table of Duties.

So, what's the importance of the Table of Duties? Well, for Luther, the Table of Duties were just as much of a part of the Small Catechism as the Six Chief Parts. For the Table of Duties describe how the faith, that was created and nourished by the Six Chief Parts, prays and lives. When Luther put the Table of Duties together, he was trying to teach what the Christian life looks like and how it is structured around our daily vocations.

These Table of Duties could be described as the Christian "house rules" on how we are to deal with one another. You see, Christians have holy orders, or vocations, that are created by God in which we all live. These vocations are the duties or responsibilities that we each owe to our neighbor.

Each of the vocations described in the Table of Duties are applicable to us. And Luther's intention in including them was to serve as us the Third Use of the Law – *our guide* – in how we ought to live in this world and what our duty is to one another. But as a word of warning, when we hear of these vocations described to us in the Table of Duties, the Second Use of the Law will be in play, because the Holy Spirit always uses the Law to accuse us. The Second Use of the Law – *mirror*, is not Luther's intention, but the Law always accuses, but the primary focus of the Table of Duties is actually that of encouragement.

You see, the Table of Duties serves us as a reorientation so that we would return to our first love, to what God has established and the orders that He has given. And order is so important in the Bible. The worst thing a person can be called in the Bible is to be lawless, that is, to be without order. And "order" means that things are actually predictable.

As human beings, we live in three estates that often overlap, but they are also unique from each other. The first of these three estates is the family. Out of the family comes the Church (The Second Estate) and the government (The Third Estate).

But in order to understand these Three Estates, God has created various vocations, or callings. He instituted vocations in life that we occupy, and God uses these vocations to care for others. The Table of Duties is divided up according to these various vocations, or callings.

Tonight, we will consider the first pair in the Table of Duties: "To Bishops, Pastors and Preachers" and "What the Hearers Owe Their Pastors."

None of the Means of Grace just happen on their own. The Means of Grace require a pastor. This is why God has instituted the Office of the Holy Ministry. This is the vocation into which all pastors are called. It is God's Office. No one can take this Office for himself. Instead, God must call men through the work of His Church, through seminary education and the churchly Divine Call. And God tells us the requirements for the Pastoral Office as we heard earlier in 1 Timothy 3: ***“The overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive”*** (1 Timothy 3:2-4).

And no pastor is perfect, just as no one is perfect, except for one: Jesus Christ. For all Christians live by faith in the forgiveness that Jesus won by His death, bodily resurrection and ascension. Yet, as those who shepherd Christ's flock, pastors are held to a higher standard. This is why St. Paul cautions ***“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil”*** (1 Timothy 3:6).

As your pastor, my Holy Office is to attend to the work of Word and Sacrament ministry. But this work takes place in the world. So, Luther adds “What the Hearers Owe Their Pastors.”

St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9(:14): ***“The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”*** Paul adds in Galatians 6(:6-7): ***“Let the one who is taught the Word share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”***

Just like laypeople, pastors and their families also can be tempted to want more daily bread. We, like, everyone else can covet what others have. Pastors can complain that they don't receive more, even when God is providing what He has promised. But at the same time, congregations can look to get pastoral care “on the cheap.” There are congregations that are stingy with supporting their pastor. But where there are congregations who faithfully provide for her pastor, such as here at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, I give thanks to God that so many people are moved by the Holy Spirit to act in generous giving through their faith in Jesus Christ, who always provides for all our needs of body and soul.

St. Paul also makes it clear that the pastor is not to speak of his own ideas or his own opinions. Instead, Paul instructs pastors in Titus 1(:9) that ***“[pastors] must hold firm to the trustworthy Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”*** So, pastors must teach what is true and correct what is false.

Again, the Office of the Ministry is not man’s office, but God’s Office. So, we must always remember how the pastor came to serve in that place. I did not put myself here. God placed me here, working through His Church as you gave me the Divine Call to proclaim God’s Law and Gospel and His Means of Grace in this place.

The writer to the Hebrews wrote: ***“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you”*** (Hebrews 13:17).

As we live in a world that is becoming more and more like the first century world, we have a pressing challenge that faces both pastors and their hearers alike. Will pastors be willing to continue proclaiming the truth of God’s Word? Will pastors continue to proclaim that Christ alone is the way to salvation? Will pastors continue to teach the Ten Commandments as God’s Commandments and not just God’s suggestions? Will pastors continue to condemn the taking of a life – including the unborn and elderly? Will pastors continue to teach against sexual immorality?

For hearers, will you be willing to hear, believe and accept these Biblical teachings, even when it pertains to a family member or close friend?

This is a great challenge that faces both pastors and hearers. But we do not face this challenge on our own. Instead, we face these challenges secure in the knowledge that Christ who was crucified on Good Friday, rose on Easter. The risen Lord, through the Holy Spirit, enables us to live in the confidence of His bodily resurrection knowing that because He rose, we, by faith in Him, will also rise!

Because of Jesus’ atoning death and bodily resurrection, He causes us to live differently from the unbelieving world, because He has called us out of this dark world and into His marvelous light! Jesus gives us eyes to recognize His Church as the place where His forgiveness reigns and the place of life everlasting. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**