

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:

This evening we continue our study on God’s Law, The Ten Commandments. As a review, we learned that everything begins with perfect fear, love, and trust in God – the First Commandment. This fear, love, and trust in God naturally effects our lips and tongues as we proclaim God’s name in praise and thanksgiving – the Second Commandment. Tonight, we move from our lips and tongues and to our ears. God designed us to listen to Him, to hear His Word.

Now, often, the Third Commandment is misunderstood. When is the sabbath day and how do I make it holy?

Well, before the Resurrection of Christ, the sabbath day was Saturday, or to be more specific sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. The sabbath was on the seventh day of the week, since that was the day God rested from creation. But over time, Jews began to cease working on the sabbath. Eventually, this became the focus of the sabbath day as if this commandment were fulfilled by doing no manual work whatsoever. Yes, God created the sabbath day so that man could recover and not be weakened by endless labor, but God never intended for man to not work on the sabbath day. Instead of ceasing from rest, they were to sanctify – *or make holy* – the holy day.

You see, our bodies need to be refreshed and restored, but the primary focus of the Third Commandment is on sanctifying the holy day by hearing God’s Word. Now, since Christ was resurrected from the dead on Sunday – the eighth day, Christians have traditionally worshipped on Sundays. But unlike the Old Testament era, Christians are not mandated to worship on a certain day, since now every day is holy. This is why Christian churches have services on Mondays, Wednesdays, as well as Sundays. But for the sake of order, Sundays have long been the day that Christians traditionally met, since as I said, that was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. So, every Sunday is like a mini-Easter.

But how often do we hear statements such as these? “I don’t need to go to church to be a Christian.” “I’m spiritual, but not religious.” But those statements are merely excuses. And those excuses are breaking the Third Commandment by “*neglecting to meet together*” (Hebrews 10:25a).

The holy day is holy in itself, because God made it holy. But at the same time, God desires the holy day to also be holy to you. Therefore, the holy day becomes holy or unholy because of you, whether you are occupied on that day with things that are holy or unholy.

To make it unholy is to neglect to hear God's Word. In recent years, Sunday has been re-labeled "Sunday Funday." It's a day to relax, stay home, watch sports. Or it's a day of recreation. But what's missing? God's Word.

To make the day holy is to be involved in holy things. You see, whenever God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, sung, or meditated upon, then the person, the day, and the work are sanctified.

So, for those who watch church services online, you are being made holy. When you hear the Word proclaimed, you are receiving the full Gospel. However, how often have those watching online said this – especially during the Covid-19 lockdowns: "It was so comforting to watch the church service, but it is just not the same as being there." Why is that? I did say by watching online, the hearer is receiving the full Gospel. What, then, is missing?

Yes, we receive the full Gospel by simply hearing God's Word, but what we are missing when we are not in this place is the fullness of the Gospel. You see, the fullness of the Gospel can only be experienced in the physical gathering of the congregation as we go about baptizing, partaking the Sacrament of the Altar, administering the Office of the Keys, and through the mutual consolation of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The fullness of the Gospel is only experienced in the physical assembling of the Christian Church.

In the Word, the Holy Spirit can bring the treasure of the full Gospel into our homes through the internet. But the fullness of the Gospel is only found in the assembly of the congregation around God's Word and Sacrament, where the Holy Spirit delivers the goods: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The whole point of the Third Commandment is for us to rest in His Word as we listen to God and thus receive His gifts. We don't come to the Divine Service to be entertained, but instead to rest as we receive God's gifts as He works on us.

The sabbath day and God's Word are not what you and I can do for Jesus. Rather, the sabbath day is all about what Jesus has done for you and still does for you. Our regular Sunday service is called the "Divine Service" because God is the one doing the serving. He serves us His grace.

This is why God wants you to hold preaching and His Word sacred. This is why we gladly hear and learn it. There is nothing more liberating than hearing how, despite your worst sins or your best efforts, Jesus gives you His rest in the forgiveness of sins.

Throughout the Divine Service, when God speaks, things happen, and they happen as we listen to what God says. So, what is God speaking?

First, God says, "You are dead in your trespasses and sins." You hear His Word, and then you confess, "You're right, God. I am a poor, miserable sinner." Then God says, "Because of My Son Jesus and His death on the cross, I make you alive; I forgive you all your sins and trespasses." Then you get to say: "Thank you, Lord! Amen!" This is the message that God loves to keep telling you. It is the message, the Word, that He wants you to keep hearing.

The Apostle Paul writes: "***So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ***" (Romans 10:17). Take note here. Notice that faith does not come by what you do or how busy you can be? Faith does not come by how-to sermons on religious living. Faith comes only one way: by hearing the preaching of Christ and Him crucified and risen for your forgiveness. This is God's complete and total message for you. He came to rescue you from sin and death in order to make you His own precious people.

But how often have you thought: "I've heard that before." "I don't need any more instruction." During Luther's day, apathy was a problem too. To apathy, we must repent and confess that sin. For as Luther says: "*This is a malignant, dangerous plague with which the devil bewitches and deceives the hearts of many so that he may surprise us and secretly take God's Word from us. Let me tell you this, even though you know God's Word perfectly and are already a master in all things: you are daily in the devil's kingdom. He ceases neither day nor night to sneak up on you and to kindle your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against these three commandments and all the commandments. Therefore, you must always have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears.*"

So, when you hear the message of Jesus working for you – to forgive you, to build you up in His mercy, to give you His life, to heal you in body and soul – not only are you keeping the Third Commandment, but you are also keeping the First Commandment.

What a great privilege it is to listen to God’s Word and receive His Sacrament. Here, you get to hear the crucified and risen Lord speak to you! Here, you get to receive His gifts! Wherever two or three are gathered, Jesus is there. Jesus is here with us tonight!

Our Lord promises that His Word will not return to Him empty. His Word will accomplish what He desires. His Word will achieve the purpose for which He sends it – that is, your forgiveness, your life, your salvation, your comfort, and your edification, as He builds you up as His precious people. Amen.

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

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**