

Sermon — 07/10/22

Text — Deuteronomy 11:18-19

(God says): “Fix these words of Mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Theme — “Who Knows?”

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The deplorable, miserable conditions which I recently observed when visiting the parishes have constrained and pressed me to put this catechism of Christian doctrine into this brief, plain, and simple form. How pitiable, so help me God, were the things that I saw: the common man, especially in the villages, knows practically nothing of Christian doctrine, and many of the pastors are almost entirely incompetent and unable to teach. Yet all the people are supposed to be Christians, have been baptized, and receive the Holy Sacrament even though they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments and live like poor animals of the barnyard and piggpen. What these people have mastered, however, is the fine art of tearing all Christian liberty to shreds.**

Wow! Those are some pretty harsh words, right? And do you know who wrote them, why, and where?

Well, they are part of Martin Luther's preface to the Small Catechism, believe it or not. You see, a few years after the Reformation started, Luther and the other reformers wanted to take stock and see how their teaching had affected the people. Before this, it had been the responsibility of the Roman Catholic bishops and archbishops to see that the Christian faith was properly taught in their regions — but they had failed miserably. Indeed, that should probably come as no surprise since Luther and the others had found so much to criticize in the doctrine and practice of these same bishops and archbishops, and so it is little wonder that they did not — indeed, they COULD not — properly teach the faith to those under

their pastoral care. But what shocked Luther was that the very same thing was also happening under the Lutherans!

The political leaders had taken over many of the supervisory spiritual duties of those bishops after the Reformation. The dukes and counts and electors and such were considered “emergency bishops” of a sort. And the hope was that they would do a better job of providing for the proper spiritual education of their people. But, as you heard from Luther’s own mouth, sadly that was NOT the case.

No, the people were just as ignorant, just as ill-taught, just as wayward in their training as under the Roman Catholics. Luther was astounded. And embarrassed. And determined to correct the mess. So it was that he wrote two very important works for the Church. *The Small Catechism*, designed for parents to teach their families (which, in those days, included servants and employees). And *The Large Catechism*, written because Luther found that way too many parish pastors were just as ignorant and lost as their parishioners — they could not even recite the Lord’s Prayer or the Creed, let alone teach the basics of the faith. So, these two works — the catechisms, Large and Small — were written to be a starting point for parents and children and families and their pastors. Start HERE, Luther says, and you **will** get the basics of Christianity.

There are Six Chief Parts to the Catechism: the Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacrament of Baptism, the Office of the Keys, and the Lord’s Supper. And we will be dealing with each of these parts under the theme of questions. So, for instance, next week we will ask the question of “Who Am I?” — with the commandments answering that question for us. Then we will discover the Creed’s answer to the question of “Who is God?”. “Who’s Your Daddy?” Brings us to the Lord’s Prayer and how we are blessed to come to our Father with all of our needs. The week after that we will discuss baptism under the heading of “Who Needs a Bath?” “Who’s In and Who’s Out?” Deals with the Office of the Keys and how God has given His Church the power and authority to forgive, or retain, sins.

“Who Needs a Hug?” Speaks to the wonders of confession and absolution, as God speaks and acts using human mouths (and embraces). Then we will finish off the series with “Who’s Hungry?” as we rejoice again in the gifts of the Lord’s Supper. Today, though, we will discuss WHY we need to study the Bible and catechism under the question of “Who Knows?” (pause)

The Bible is a big book. You can tell that just by looking at it. The internet tells us that the average Bible has about 1200 pages (depending upon type size). But it is big in another way. It is big in terms of its content and what it teaches. Honestly, there are all sorts of things in the Bible. Certainly there is history — from the world’s creation, through the stories of the Flood, to the history of the Jewish people through literally thousands of years. You also find poetry (like the Psalms) and words of wisdom (like the Proverbs). There’s even geography and biography in its pages.

But, of course, the most important thing — the reason for its existence — is theology. To teach us about God and man. About why we are here, and how we got here, and where we are going. About sin and forgiveness, Law and Gospel. Now, such a topic is overwhelming. How can we ever hope to master it? How do we know where to start? Where to focus? How do we know essential from the details? For most of us, it would be just too much. We might be tempted to drift off into the weeds, or to mess up the message, or just to plain give up. That is pretty much the kind of thing that Luther talked about in those opening words of our sermon today. We need guidance and direction. We need a starting place. We need help in sorting through that great, huge book. And so we have the catechism.

In six “chief parts”, the catechism distills the Bible down to its basics. The commandments show us our sin and desperate need for a Savior. The Creed tells us how God provides that salvation to us, along with all things we need. The Lord’s Prayer teaches us to call God “our Father” and bring Him all our concerns. Baptism is the adoption in which we are washed clean of our sin, joined to Christ, and made God’s children and heirs. The Office of the Keys is the daily forgiveness given us by God through

the Church. And the Lord's Supper is that foretaste of heaven itself, as we feed upon the very Body and Blood of our Savior. There is nothing extraneous or intimidating or confusing about this brief condensation of Scripture and its theology! No, it is clear and concise and to-the-point. Not that we can or should ignore all the rest of the what the Bible says — how can we, since it IS God's Word to us? But here in the catechism we have the best summary, the best guide, to what ALL of the Bible says.

And listen to how Luther starts each of its sections: "*As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household.*" Simple. Plain. In every-day language that even children can understand. But note well WHO is to do the teaching. It is not the pastor. It is not a parochial school teacher. It is not a Sunday school or VBS teacher. It is the parents. Or, to be more precise, the father. God has given these children to YOU. And He expects YOU to train and raise them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Just as we heard in our text today, when God said to Israel that parents — fathers! — were to teach their children. At home and when traveling. When they were sitting together for meals or relaxation. Whenever and wherever opportunity presents itself. So, perhaps the simplicity of the catechism's words is not just for the kids! Maybe it is to help parents get the words straight in THEIR heads, so they would be able to teach when they had the chance.

And that really brings me to my next point: all of us, regardless of age or maturity in the faith, need to study these words. Because we need to constantly be taught ourselves. And because we need to be ready and able to teach them when we can. But DO we? And sadly, here I fear we are not too far off from those poor Germans that Luther found on his visits. We have all the benefits that were not available to them: we have multiple copies of the Bible in our homes. We have catechisms galore — and if someone does NOT have either a Bible or a catechism, we would happily provide one free of charge. But how often do we really study them? Far too many Lutherans think they learned all that in their confirmation days and so do not re-read and study them now. And how often do we take the time

to teach the catechism to our children? And instead, how often do we simply assume they will be taught by someone else? Like the church, the pastor, their Sunday School teachers? But it is OUR responsibility — God has given these children to US! (pause)

Here's a little quiz for you. Think of the explanation to the Third Commandment. How many of us can do that? Well, it says this: "*We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.*" God has given us His Word. He has given us an excellent summary of it in the catechism. But we all too often do NOT gladly hear and learn it.

And why is it that God wants — even commands — us to hear and learn that Word? Because we need it. Because it shows us our sin. But even more, because it shows us our Savior. Those commandments that we break — like this one, by our failures to hear and learn God's Word — all those commandments Jesus HAS kept. And He has done so to give YOU the credit. And He has paid the debt, the curse, the hell for our sins against them. For you and your salvation, God became man. God suffered and died. God rose. And He calls you — through that very Word — to receive His grace, His forgiveness, His love. In baptism, He has washed you clean and claimed you as His own. In the Lord's Prayer He invites you to come to Him as dear children come to their dear and loving Father. Through the Office of the Keys, He richly and daily forgives all sins to you and all Christians. In the Lord's Supper He feeds your faith as you eat and drink the very Body and Blood which have done all this for you.

All this love. For you, a poor miserable sinner who deserves NONE of it. And all of it given to you as you read and study and hear His Word. So, why WOULDN'T we want to devote ourselves to daily study of that Word, in the Bible and the catechism? What a tremendous blessing and gift we have been given, indeed! (pause)

Luther's preface to the catechism talked about how wretched and pitiful and sad was the world he found amongst those who did not know God and His love, as taught in His precious Word. And so it is today too. Just imagine how much better our own little worlds and lives would be if we were to truly devote ourselves to studying and teaching that Word of life! That is what we will be doing for the remaining Sundays this summer in these sermons. But remember, there are six other days each week for us to use too! So, as Luther pleads, let us all remain students of the catechism and review it regularly — even daily — in our homes. For our own sakes. And for our families. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Wed — Hymn  
OS — Offertory/Offering  
FE — Nicene Creed