

Sermon – 07/18/21  
*(The Creed)*

Text – Psalm 136

Theme – “His Mercy Endures Forever”

---

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

Last week in the sermon we talked about the first part of the Small Catechism -- the Ten Commandments – the summary of God’s Law to us. We talked about how the Law puts the spotlight on us, on how we are the subject of each of those commands from God. And we talked about how the Law forces us to the inescapable conclusion that we are sinners, failures in keeping those commandments in even the most superficial way (let alone perfectly and completely). As sinners, we stand under the condemnation of God and have no hope of digging ourselves out of the hole into which our sin puts us.

But we also talked about how that terrible and damning condemnation of the Law is necessary for us, in that it prepares us to hear the saving Gospel: the Good News of Christ Jesus, who has perfectly fulfilled the Law on our behalf (and in our place), keeping the commandments and suffering our hell on the cross. In that painful work of crushing and destroying our pretended self-righteousness, the Law is indeed a blessing from the Lord for it drives us to Christ, and without it we would never appreciate or trust the Gospel.

We also talked about how that same Law is a blessing in that it gives us some order and structure and safety in this fallen world, where other sinners would oppress and harm us. But the Law, in some degree, puts man’s sinful nature and actions on a leash as it threatens punishment here on earth. And so, from a strictly worldly point of view, we should also see the Law as a blessing from God.

And finally, we talked about how the Law is a treasure for us Christians in that it shows us how to lead lives that are pleasing to God and of service to our neighbor. The Law guides us in how to show God's love to others and, in that love, we show ourselves to truly be our Father's children. (pause)

Today's section of the Catechism is the Creed, where we learn more about just who that God is and what He has done for us. The text for our sermon today is, as I announced earlier, Psalm 136; especially this phrase which appears in each of its 26 verses: "*His mercy endures forever*". Mentioned in that psalm are the creation of the world in the beginning; God's saving deliverance of Israel from Egypt; and His calling of Israel to be His own. In many ways, this is exactly the same pattern – that is, God as our Creator/Savior/Sanctifier – that we see in the Creed.

The First Article of the Creed says: "I believe in God: the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth." Luther explains what that means this way:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my limbs, my reason, and all my senses, and still preserves them; in addition thereto, clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and homestead, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He provides me richly and daily with all that I need to support this body and life, protects me from all danger, and guards me and preserves me from all evil; and all this out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I owe it to Him to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

God *is* the Creator. The Bible tells us that He made everything in the whole universe in six days, simply by saying "*Let there be...*". The Bible also tells us *why* God created everything: that is, He made man to be His children, and He made everything else to make our lives complete. The sun and moon and stars. The mountains and oceans and plains. The animals and plants. Even the angels who serve us, God's children.

And God did all of that simply because He wanted to share, to give, to love. God is God. He is complete and whole and needs nothing/no one. But He creates so that He can bestow His grace on us.

And not even Adam's sin changed that. He did not just cast aside mankind, or the rest of His creation, when it was ruined by our sin. No, He continues to love it and tend it and care for it.

In fact, that is the bulk of Luther's explanation of the First Article. Luther does not spend much time about creation in the beginning but instead wants to impress upon us how God still creates and gives to us **today**. That list of things Luther gives always makes me chuckle a bit. I have this picture in my mind of the great man sitting in his study at the first Lutheran parsonage and looking around at all the "stuff" God had given him there. It's a rather complete list, I think we would admit. A list that we would be able to echo, at least most of the things there. But Luther's point is that ALL we have has been given us by God's gracious hand. Do we deserve *any* of it? No. Indeed, what we deserve from God is NO good thing but only pain and suffering and damnation. And yet God gives us life and everything in it. He gives us friends and family. He gives us work and rest. He gives us food and drink. A place to live. All that we need (and more!), God gives.

And, as Luther concludes, even if God gave us nothing else it would still be our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him because of the *earthly* blessings He showers upon us each day. In these things, God has proven His love – His Fatherly and divine love – to us. This IS most certainly true!  
(pause)

That brings us, then, to the Second Article of the Creed (and its Meaning) which says:

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

*What does this mean?* I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won [delivered] me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in

everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

Think about the enormity of what this Second Article says. God became **man**. God took MY place. God put Himself under the Law and carried *my* sin. **God** suffered. **God** died. All those things are just as impossible (to the human mind) as is the teaching that Jesus was born of a virgin. How can any of that be? How could the Father give His Only-Begotten Son, knowing that He would have to bear the hell merited by you and me – how could He do that? How could the Son make Himself lower than all of us, being our very Servant, setting aside full use of His divine abilities? How could God – the Author of Life – die? But He did all that, for you!

There is nothing so amazing as that. Nothing. Not just *what* God did, but also that He would do it all for rebellious, hateful, ungrateful sinners like us. Remember, when Satan and the other evil angels rebelled against God, He cast them out of heaven and damned them. But for us – whose sins are no less than the devil's – for *us*, He comes down from heaven and takes our hell. Even though He knows that so many will reject Him anyway. Still He does it. Still He sacrifices Himself. For **you**. And not because He wants or needs anything from you (for He does not) but simply because, as Luther says, He desires us to be His own dear children and to share His heaven with us. (pause)

Yet the Bible also tells us that sin has such a hold of us that, if left to ourselves, none of us would believe or accept the gift Christ has won at such a tremendous price. No, we are too proud, too confident, too self-righteous, too blind to see just how lost we are without Christ. We need God to open our eyes, to raise us from spiritual deadness, to give us faith in that Gospel. Which is what the Third Article of the Creed teaches us:

I believe in the Holy Ghost; one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

*What does this mean?* I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.

After all that Jesus has done for us, it would still do us no good if the Holy Spirit did not come to us and give us faith in Christ's work for us. But the Holy Spirit DOES do that: as the Gospel is brought and applied to us in so many ways. First of all, in baptism, where we are washed clean as the Gospel Word is poured on us along with the water. There we are remade, adopted into God's own family. And all by the work of God.

Or think of how many ways the Gospel comes to us in Word. As little children, taught at our parents' knee. In Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, confirmation class, Bible study. In the preached word of sermons. In the pictures of stained glass windows, statues, paintings, or other artwork. In hymns and songs and choir anthems. In conversation with Christian spouses and friends and family members. In the absolution pronounced by the pastor, as the called mouth-piece of Christ. Over and over again the Holy Spirit speaks to you of what Christ has done, and in that Word He works faith – and sustains it.

And we dare not forget the pure Gospel of the Lord's Supper, where the very Body and Blood of Christ are given to us to eat and drink, for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. Here we have a piece of heaven, a foretaste of the eternal wedding banquet of the Lamb and His Bride, the Church. (pause)

The Third Article also talks about how we are not alone — isolated and solitary individuals, left to wander by ourselves in a harsh and foreign land, amongst strangers and enemies. No, we are

members of the Church, the Body of Christ. We are joined to our Lord and Savior, made one with Him, by faith. But then so are all other Christians. So, if I am one with Jesus -- and you certainly ARE one with Him -- then we must be one with each other, right? What a blessing it is to know that we here in the Church — the family of God — we have bonds closer and stronger and more permanent than any other. So, take a good look at the person sitting next to you, because you will be seeing him or her for a long time – forever, in fact! What Christ has done for you, He has also done for your neighbor. God loves him with the same love with which He has loved you. God has given everything for him, so you must (and will, and do) love him too. (pause)

*“O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever!”* So says the first verse of that beautiful psalm of thanks and joy. In creating the world in the beginning AND in giving you life and everything you need in it. But infinitely more, and greater, He shows that love/mercy by living and dying and rising again for you – suffering hell itself for you -- so that you might have forgiveness and heaven forever with Him. And in giving you faith in Jesus Christ, in keeping you in that faith each day, and in bringing you to its fulfillment on the Last Day. No wonder we are enjoined to give thanks to God – for His mercy most certainly DOES endure forever! Amen.

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

OS – Hymn