

## I.N.I.

Second Sunday after Pentecost  
June 23, 2019  
Exodus 20:1-3

In Christ Jesus, who has fulfilled the Law of God for us as our Substitute, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our seminary days we were encouraged to listen to Martin Luther who encouraged pastors of his day to preach often on the Catechism. Luther wrote: “The Catechism is the Bible of the laymen. In it the entire body of the Christian doctrine, which every Christian must know in order to be saved, is contained... The Catechism is doctrine at its best. Therefore it ought to be constantly preached.”

In his introduction to his Small Catechism Luther states the reason he wrote it: “The deplorable destitution which I recently observed, during a visitation of the churches has impelled and constrained me to prepare this Catechism of Christian Doctrine in such a small and simple form. Alas, what manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, know nothing at all of Christian doctrine; and many pastors are quite unfit and incompetent to teach.”

So Luther wrote the Small Catechism and intended it especially for father’s to teach their children. At the beginning of each Chief Part he writes: “As the Head of the Family Should Teach Them in a Simple Way to His Household.”

Twelve years ago we went through this simple Catechism and the Lord willing, this summer we will again be going through it by looking at each of the six chief parts. These six chief parts are not just doctrine, but they are practical teaching us about our Savior Jesus, and how we are to live our life of faith, love and thanksgiving to our Triune God.

The 10 commandments can be summed up in one word: **LOVE!**

Jesus summarized all Ten Commandments into two sentences. **"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND...." '...YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'**

Notice the prevailing word **LOVE**. The first three commandments Jesus sums up in the words **LOVE GOD**, complete, perfect love of heart, soul and mind! The next seven commandments Jesus sums up in the words **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR**, as you do yourself.

If we could love perfectly—from the heart in perfect, obedient love, we would be able to keep everyone of God’s commands as Adam and Eve did for awhile in the Garden of Eden.

In our commandment study we will be following a simple format for each one. We will take apart the commandment; find out what it demands of us; see how it applies to our lives; find out why it was given and see how and by whom alone it has been fulfilled. We will also be looking briefly at Bible stories that apply to each commandment.

The Law of God has been given to man to show us how to be holy like God. It shows us what God demands of us; what we are to do and what we are not to do.

The LORD introduced His Commandments with these words: **I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, OUT OF THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE.** By these words He was showing to the Israelites and to all of us that He is our loving God, He is the Promise God, the Jehovah God, the God of our salvation. He is the One who has created us, clothed us, kept us safe, protected us, and provided for us. He alone is our God. We learned last Sunday that this God is the Triune God of our salvation.

The first and foremost of all commandments is this:

**YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.**

In verse four of Ex. 20 God gives His own brief commentary of this commandment. It reads; **YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FOR YOURSELF ANY CARVED IMAGE, OR ANY LIKENESS OF ANYTHING THAT IS IN HEAVEN ABOVE, OR THAT IS IN THE EARTH BENEATH, OR THAT IS IN THE WATER UNDER THE EARTH; YOU SHALL NOT BOW DOWN TO THEM NOR SERVE THEM.**

In my years as pastor I have found that when I am instructing adults for the first time, many think that this is one of the commandments they have been able to keep. When have they ever bowed down to any other gods? Only if perhaps we came from unchristian religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam could we say we have ever broken and sinned against this commandment. And that is why this first

commandment is many times looked upon as the command against idols, which it is. Well I for one have never bowed down to any other false idol. I never prayed to or worshipped any golden, silver or wooden statue, and I'm sure none of you here have either. And yet we are so very guilty of breaking this first commandment. Guilty everyday! For this commandment speaks of much more than just worshiping idols made by hands out of gold, silver and wood but it speaks of idols or gods made up in our minds, our hearts, our thoughts, or even our possessions.

In our confirmation class we teach that there are two kinds of idolatry: Open and Secret. Open idolatry is when we worship any creature as God, or believe in a god who is not the Triune God. In the Old Testament there were the false gods Baal, Dagan, Astarte, Asherah, Moloch, Chemosh, and Aseroth. Today open idolatry is committed by all of those who worship Buddha; Allah; Krishna; the Jehovah God of the Jews; their ancestors; and the many, many other heathen gods. In fact all of the gods of this world apart from the Triune God are idols, false gods. That is Open idolatry.

Secret idolatry is what really applies to most of us. That is when we place someone or something other than God first in our life. When we fear, love and trust someone or something as God. Luther wrote; "That upon which you set your heart and put your trust, is in reality your god."

One commentator wrote, "When I hold on to my money tighter than to my Master, trust my muscles more than my Maker, respect people's opinions more than my Redeemers' what am I really doing? I'm telling God that He's not the only one, that someone else has the hold of my hearts that He alone has the right to have."

In his explanation to this first commandment Luther wrote: "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things." Above all things!

**FEAR, LOVE, TRUST!** How often don't we fear—that is respect, revere others more than our God? How often don't we love others and other things more than God? How often don't we trust others and other things more than God? If we could keep this first commandment, if we could fear, love and trust in God above all things then we would keep all of the commandments. No doubt that is one of the reasons why God placed this one first.

If we perfectly revered and respected God we would never misuse His precious name by cursing or swearing. We would never have hateful or lustful thoughts toward others.

If we loved God perfectly we would never think of despising God's Word by not coming to church to hear it. We would always use it daily and faithfully in our readings and studies. We would love and perfectly obey our parents and all superiors if we loved God perfectly. We would always treat our spouse with love, compassion, kindness and understanding if we perfectly loved our God. We would never gossip about anyone or in any way hurt our neighbor's reputation by our words or actions, if we loved God perfectly.

If we trusted God above all things we would never worry, never be anxious or sinfully concerned about our jobs, our finances, our health, our families, our possessions. We would never covet anything, but always have holy desires and be content with only what we have, if we perfectly trusted God.

Let's just take a few minutes of this morning's sermon to look back upon our life and see how we have treated this first commandment and our God. Who of us has not complained about our work, our life, our health, our children/spouse, our finances? Who of us this past week has always remembered to thank God for every blessing of every day? Who of us prayed to the Lord first when we got sick or felt ill or did we first run to the medicine cabinet or call the trusted doctor? Do we always remember to ask the Lord to bless the medicine we take and to give to the doctor the ability and knowledge to treat us properly? How often have we thanked God this past week for our good health? Have we spent more time and money on our own luxuries, relaxation and pleasures than in service to God and His Church and the spread of the Gospel?

This is not a pleasant task thinking of all the ways we have broken God's Law in just this one commandment. It fills us with us shame. It leads us to honestly see what we are like as human beings and how God sees us. It should lead us to fall down on our knees and ask the LORD God whose commandments we daily break to forgive us, to not look upon our multitude of sins. And that is the first purpose of the Law, the first reason why the Law was given. To Show us Our Sins!

If there were no first commandment we would not know that it was wrong to respect and revere other people—peers and companions more than God. If there were no first commandment we would not know that it was wrong to love ourselves or the things of this earth more than God. If there were no first commandment we would not know that it was wrong to trust in our bank accounts, wages, retirement benefits and things more than God.

Martin Luther in writing on this first commandment said that while he was a youth in the Catholic Church he was taught when he had a toothache he should fast and pray to St. Appolonia. When he feared fire he should pray to St. Lawrence. If he was afraid of becoming poor he should pray to St. Sebastian.

Our God says, “look to Me, pray to Me, turn to Me! Cling only to Me! Allow Me and no one else to be your God. Never seek another. Whatever good thing you might lack, look to Me for it. Whenever misfortune, distress, sickness, peril, pain or troubles come; turn to Me. I will supply your needs, I will heal your wounds, I will help you out of every situation. I alone will save you”

Those are His promises and He has assured us He can keep them because He has met and taken care of our worst problem, our sins. He sent His Son Jesus who was placed under this same first commandment and kept it perfectly in His thoughts, words and actions. He **FEARED** His Father perfectly—respecting Him above everyone else, placing His Word and commands above everyone else. He **LOVED** His Father perfectly--regarding Him as His dearest treasure and devoting His whole life to Him. He **TRUSTED** His Father perfectly—putting His whole confidence in Him, relying upon Him and taking Him at His Word allowing Himself to be even damned for us.

He not only fulfilled this commandment for us, but by His suffering and death He paid the punishment we deserved. He took our guilt upon Himself. He took the very transgressions we committed against this first commandment and paid for them in full, so that God the Father now looks at each of us in Christ and says, “What perfect children I have.”

Motivated by that great forgiving love of our Savior we too will be led to emulate those Old Testament heroes of faith we read about earlier and **FEAR** God like Joseph did when we are tempted in this life; **LOVE** God like Abraham did when we are called upon to endure sacrifices in this life; and **TRUST** God like Daniel did when we face the troubles and trials of this life.

With this knowledge of forgiving love in our hearts, the Holy Spirit will lead us to strive to be obedient to this first commandment and put down any sinful pride within us and place all of our confidence in our Triune God for our blessings. May we look to our heavenly Father for our blessings, comfort and help—look to our Savior Jesus for our forgiveness, life and salvation--and look to the Holy Spirit for the hope that never fades; the love that never fails and the trust that shall be made complete and perfect in our home above.

Amen.