

Text: 5th Commandment and Meaning

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Fifth Commandment and it's meaning found on page 321 of your hymnals. "You shall not murder. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need."

Boys and Girls, I pray that you are physically doing well today. Have you ever said a bad word to mom and dad? I am sure that you have. I am also sure that they did not threaten to kill you because of it. That has happened before. In fact it happened to Martin Luther. Martin Luther once said something that the emperor did not like and Luther almost died because of it.. Martin Luther stood before the Emperor and church leaders. He was asked to recant, to deny his writings that he had written against the church. In response, he gives his now famous statement. "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason and not by Popes and councils who have so often contradicted themselves, my conscience is captive to the word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me." You would think that the Emperor and church would be happy. Alas, they called for Luther's death. Anyone who found him could kill him. Happily, his patron, Fredrick the Wise, helped Luther and kept him safe in Castle Wartburg. That is one example of keeping the Fifth commandment. How else can we do so? How can you do so? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

"You shall not murder." At first glance, this appears to be an easy commandment to keep. We do not take our neighbor's very life. We do not shed his blood for any reason. Yet, this commandment goes more deeply than merely the shedding or not shedding of blood. It speaks to why the action of killing and murder arises in the first place. From our heart comes anger and malice, jealousy and envy against our neighbor. We see the things our

neighbor has and we try to get them by hurting him, thinking that if we hurt him then he will not get to enjoy them. We get angry when our neighbor does not do what we desire him to do. When we are stuck at a stop light, how many of us have thrown our hands up in anger because traffic hasn't moved fast enough for us? Or how many times have we wished that someone else would get the sickness that we have when it seems as though they are always healthy? Yet here, the Lord like a kind Father forbids even the very start of an argument. As Luther writes in his Large Catechism. "Thus this commandment aims at this, that no one offend his neighbor on account of any evil deed, even though he have fully deserved it. For where murder is forbidden, all cause also is forbidden whence murder may originate. For many a one, although he does not kill, yet curses and utters a wish, which would stop a person from running far if it were to strike him in the neck [makes imprecations, which if fulfilled with respect to any one, he would not live long].¹⁸⁷ Now, since this inheres in every one by nature and it is a common practice that no one is willing to suffer at the hands of another, God wishes to remove the root and source by which the heart is embittered against our neighbor, and to accustom us ever to keep in view this commandment, always to contemplate ourselves in it as in a mirror, to regard the will of God, and with hearty confidence and invocation of His name to commit to Him the wrong which we suffer. Thus we shall suffer our enemies to rage and be angry, doing what they can, and we learn to calm our wrath, and to have a patient, gentle heart, especially toward those who give us cause to be angry, that is, our enemies."

It is easy for us to get angry at our enemies, we do so often times without even thinking of it. That's how easy it is for anger to arise in our hearts. Yet this commandment is not only about physically harming our neighbor, it also speaks against those who can do them good but do not. "If, therefore, you send away one that is naked when you could clothe him, you have caused him to freeze to death; if you see one suffer hunger and do not give him food, you have caused him to starve. So also, if you see any one innocently sentenced to death or in like distress, and do not save him, although you know ways and means to do so, you have killed him. And it will not avail you to make the pretext that you did not afford any help, counsel, or aid thereto, for you have withheld your love from him and deprived him of the benefit whereby his life would have been saved." As

James writes, “and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”

Thanks be to God that He has not harbored anger in His heart against us for our many great, and grievous, sins against our neighbor! Instead, in His great mercy, He gave us His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus took upon Himself all of the times when we have been angry with our neighbor, all those times when we have wished harm to befall them, when we have not helped our neighbor as we should. Jesus had removed the punishment of every single one of our sins. He suffered, bled, and died for, to pay the penalty for them, that we are forgiven of all of our sins.

Through the blessed Sacraments, God gives us His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in us and empowers us to show our love and thanks to God, not merely in a spiritual way, but in physical ways towards our neighbor. The Holy Spirit empowers us so that we can do things like collecting food for Alliance for Youth and donate clothing and unused items to Goodwill, that we can meet the needs of our neighbor in simple ways like providing food, clothing, a safe place to meet for those combating alcoholism and abuse, and many more. Let us read the fifth commandment and meaning together. May God help us that we may keep this commandment in service to our neighbor and help him in every physical need as long as both shall live.

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