

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twentieth Sunday After Trinity, October 9, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 22, 287:6, 289, 295, 285:1-3.

Lessons: Genesis 4:1-15, Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 5:17-26.

Sermon Text: Exodus 20:13.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We should be shocked and horrified at the murder of five people at a mall in Washington State on September 23, 2016. We should be shocked and horrified at the murder of 50 people in Orlando, FL, June 13, 2016. We should be shocked and horrified at the murder of 9 people at an Oregon college on October 1, 2015. We should be shocked and horrified at the deaths of 20 children and six adults at a school in Connecticut on December 14, 2012. We should be shocked and horrified at the death of one person and injury of three people at Northern Arizona University on August 9, 2015. We should be shocked and horrified at the shooting of two people at Texas Southern University in Houston on August 9, 2015, which was the 47th school shooting in the United States that year. We should be shocked and horrified at police officers murdered. And yet an editorial in the August 6, 2015 Mankato Free Press stated “We simply sit and wait for the next massacre”.

We should be shocked and horrified at the deaths of at least 95 people at the suicide bombing in Ankara, Turkey on October 10, 2015. We should be shocked and horrified at the murder of another person in the Twin Cities, or the gunshots that were fired in Mankato, allegedly by gang members on October 11, 2015. But don't these kinds of things happen every day. Look at your daily paper or listen to the news each day.

We should be shocked and horrified every time we hear the words “I hate you”.

We should be shocked and horrified at the anger and hatred that springs up in our hearts every time someone does or even says something we don't like.

But are we shocked and horrified at all these situations? When we remember

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

- 1. We learn that we dare not murder, do bodily harm, or even hate our fellow men.**
- 2. We learn that we should help and be a friend to every one of our neighbors.**

When you hear this commandment do you give a sigh of relief? After all, you've never murdered anyone, have you. But wait before you praise yourself for obedience.

What is God protecting with this commandment? He is protecting body and life and well-being for us and for our neighbor. And of course, our “neighbor” is every other human being. There is a very good reason for this. God created man in his own image – sinless and perfect – and gives us this life as a time for the renewal of that image. How can that happen? By growing in faith in Jesus. We read in Scripture: ***“I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.”*** 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NIV)

We must remember that our life is in his hand, and that only God and his appointed representatives have the right to take it. In his large Catechism, Luther says “Therefore, what is here forbidden is forbidden to the individual in his relation to anyone else, and not to the government.”

How do we sin against this commandment? What does God forbid in the Fifth Commandment? Very simply, we are to do no bodily harm to our neighbor.

God forbids us to take the life of a fellow man – murder – or our own life – suicide.

Cain killed his brother; David had Uriah treacherously placed into such a position that he would be killed; Herod, his wife, and her daughter were guilty of the death of John the Baptist. By false accusations Jezebel had Naboth killed to steal his vineyard; and the Jews crucified Jesus. As we examine typical examples, we must realize that person is guilty of murder who willfully exposes anyone to mortal danger, who persuades someone to harm someone else, or accuses an innocent person of a crime for which he is punished. We are guilty of murder when by carelessness, neglect, or bad workmanship we cause fatal accidents, or when a person loses his life because we purposely did not warn him of impending danger and did not help him to escape. Suicide may not be excused on the theory that a man's life belongs to him, and that he can do with it what he pleases, for our life belongs to God. He gave it, and he alone may take it.

We must recognize that abortion, that is, the killing of an unborn child; and "mercy death", called euthanasia, and assisting suicide are forbidden. We dare not take our own lives, or harm our health and shorten our own lives. These kinds of things can be done by laziness, neglect of the body, foolhardiness, overeating, overdrinking, unchastity, anger, worry, poisoning one's body or losing control of one's senses by the abuse of alcohol or other drugs.

We may kill animals for our food and clothing, or when they are harmful to us. But we may not kill man.

As God gave us life he alone may take it. He does this through sickness, accident, and what we call "natural death". The government has the right to inflict the death penalty and to wage just wars in defense of the people.

God forbids us to hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, that is, to do or say anything which may destroy, shorten, or embitter his life. We must not harm our neighbor in his body by hurting his feelings, causing him grief, worry, sorrow, and distress, and thus embitter his life, as Pharaoh did to the children of Israel, and Joseph's brothers did to their father. Grief and worry undermines health. Children sometimes harm their parents by causing them such grief and worry. Neither may we harm ourselves by worry, overwork, by neglecting our health and indulging in harmful habits. We must not even intentionally injure our own bodies, or expose ourselves unnecessarily to dangers.

We may defend ourselves to the extent of preventing others from doing injury; but having suffered a wrong at their hands, we should not avenge ourselves to "get even with them" by doing wrong to them. ***"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."*** Romans 12:19 (NIV)

Every hateful thought or word is a sin. Rather we should "give place" unto the wrath of God, who will repay the evildoer. A Christian's "revenge" is to return good for evil ***"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."*** 1 Peter 3:9 (NIV) God forbids us to bear anger and hatred in our hearts against our neighbor. ***"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."*** 1 John 3:15 (NIV)

Murder starts in the heart. God is clear about that: ***"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."*** Matthew 15:19 (NIV)

Even the thought of killing someone, or the wish that he might get hurt or harmed is a sin. We read in John's gospel: ***"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."*** 1 John 3:15 (NIV) ***and*** 132: There is a righteous anger, which is aroused by the sin that has been committed, for Jesus himself was angry with sin. The anger forbidden in the Fifth Commandment is a personal resentment against our neighbor himself, which shows itself in such ways as even expressions on the face and in calling of names. We should be deeply displeased with the sin a brother has committed, but have no hard feelings against him personally, and if such feeling arises, we must not ***"let the sun go down while you are still angry,"*** Ephesians 4:26 (NIV) but be reconciled to our brother. Anger that is nursed develops into hatred which is not just a momentary outburst of temper, but an intense dislike and enmity. Hatred is the opposite of love. It is murder in the heart. We should hate sin, but not the person who sinned against us.

But we should fearlessly risk our own health and life when it is necessary to do so in order to defend our country, to fulfill the duties of our calling, or to save others. The Scriptures tell us ***"This is how we know what***

love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” 1 John 3:16 (NIV)

God requires of us in the Fifth Commandment that we should help and befriend our neighbor in every bodily need. This means to be merciful, kind, considerate and forgiving toward him in word and deed. We are to be patient, kind, and forgiving toward everyone. We are to help and befriend everyone in every bodily need. We are to give him what he needs in his hunger, thirst, sickness, poverty, lack of shelter and proper care and any danger that may threaten our neighbor.

We are to be and behave as a true friend when he is forsaken, and people have turned against him, and continue to assist him, till his condition improves.

All this we should do not only to our friends, but also to our enemies

We keep this Commandment in our hearts by being merciful, by having true pity and sincere compassion for our neighbor who is in need. As Jesus had compassion with the people and showed mercy to many during his life on earth so we should have compassion on those who suffer.

We should be kind in our words and dealings with others, patient, gentle, not easily provoked and angered, even though they be gruff and insulting. ***“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*** Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

We are to be forgiving. When someone has done evil against us, we should not nurse a grudge, but forgive, as Joseph forgave his brethren, and as God so richly and daily forgives our sins.

Alas, how guilty are we all under this Commandment! Hurting, harming, hating, being angry with our neighbor – how terrible our hearts and words are!

And yet there is hope. How has Jesus fulfilled the Fifth Commandment for us? By keeping this commandment perfectly for us, in our place, and by dying for all our sins. God takes Jesus’ perfection and attributes it to us, justifying us, that is, declaring us “not guilty”. In addition, Jesus suffered all the punishments of hell that we deserved because of our sins so that we might have eternal life.

By his healing the sick and helping the needy and showing kindness to all, Jesus gives us a guideline for our lives. We must use this commandment as a guide for those things, words, and thoughts that God wants from us. And we must then also thank him for his goodness by treating his gift of body and life in ways which are pleasing to him. And so the love of God displayed in the Scriptures becomes the guideline for the Christian in doing good to our fellow men. May this commandment daily be our guide in deed, in word, and in thought! Amen.