

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

When our Lord became man. He proclaimed, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11). Sabbath means rest. Jesus in this passage declares that He is our rest, our Sabbath. In Jesus, the Sabbath has been fulfilled. St. Paul writes to those who doubted that truth, **“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ”** (Colossians 2).

We Christians live in Christ, and in Christ we enjoy a freedom unknown in the Old Testament. All those Old Testament laws that the Church is no longer bound to keep—we won’t be sacrificing any bulls or goats today, for instance—were given to point to Christ, and, thanks be to God, Christ has come. No one day of the week is now any holier than another, and there is no day on which we are forbidden to work, although rest is still certainly necessary for our well-being and most beneficial. The command to hear the Word still most definitely stands, but any day in which the Word is heard and meditated upon is sanctified, made holy in Christ. Because Christ rose on a Sunday, the Church has historically chosen this day now as a special day for gathering to gladly hear and learn the Word, that is, to listen to, contemplate, and take to heart what is preached.

Luther writes about how people sin against the command to hear and learn the Word in the Large Catechism, in paragraph 4 of the insert in your worship folders:

Therefore not only those sin against this commandment who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, as those who on account of their greed or frivolity neglect to hear God's Word or lie in taverns and are dead drunk like swine; but also that other crowd, who listen to God's Word as to any other trifle, and only from custom come to preaching, and go away again, and at the end of the year know as little of it as at the beginning...

Know, therefore, that you must be concerned not only about hearing, but also about learning and retaining it in memory, and do not think that it is optional with you or of no great importance, but that it is God's commandment, who will require of you how you have heard, learned, and honored His Word.

Likewise those fastidious spirits are to be reprov'd who, when they have heard a sermon or two, find it tedious and dull, thinking that they know all that well enough, and need no more instruction.
(*Concordia Triglotta*, 607-609)

Don’t get me wrong, it’s great that you’re here, but Luther is right. If you think that being here is a good work, you’re sadly mistaken. Being here is no better than being on a lawn chair in your backyard and soaking in the sun or watching a game on television or twiddling your thumbs in bed. What matters with regard to this Commandment is what you do when you’re here.

So are you listening and learning? Do you remember what you hear and learn here? Do you ponder it at all after you leave, or is it in one ear and out the other, is it hastily shoved out of your mind by less important thoughts or concerns?

Part of how well we listen depends upon how much we think we have to learn. If we think we know enough, or, God forbid, it all, we’re not going to listen. If we think that what is being taught isn’t important, we’re not going to listen. So how much do you think you know? As Christians, we can always learn more. I don’t think we need to take tests to prove that, but I’d be glad to write some up if you’d like me to. Or do you perhaps think none of this is very important? I bet you won’t think the same at your life’s end.

Arrogance or apathy, has either been clogging your ears like earwax? It's almost always one or the other, and that's not just for laypeople. Luther takes pastors to task in the beginning of the Large Catechism as well:

We have no slight reasons for treating the Catechism so constantly [in sermons] and for both desiring and beseeching others to teach it, since we see to our sorrow that many pastors and preachers are very negligent in this, and slight both their office and this teaching; some from great and high art (giving their mind, as they imagine, to much higher matters), but others from sheer laziness and care for their paunches...

And although they have now everything that they are to preach and teach placed before them so abundantly, clearly, and easily, in so many [excellent and] helpful books...yet they are not so godly and honest as to buy these books, or even when they have them, to look at them or read them. Alas! they are altogether shameful gluttons and servants of their own bellies who ought to be more properly swineherds and dog-tenders than care-takers of souls and pastors. (*ibid.*, 567)

Yeah, Martin, those pastors are horrible, my flesh says. Uh oh, I'm one of those pastors, my conscience realizes. And I am one of those pastors. And many of you are one of those laypeople. As confessional Lutherans, we are blessed with so much wonderful material at our disposal, yet what do many of us most often give our minds to or spend out time in? Unfortunately, things not nearly as important or beneficial as the unchanging Word that changes us whenever we lug our hearts and minds into contact with it.

Isaiah promises us:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55)

Why study God's Word? Why gladly hear and learn it? Because it never comes back empty in its season, because the Word is where we meet Christ—in the written Word of the Scriptures, in the preached Word of godly sermons, and in the visible Word of Baptism, Absolution, and Holy Communion.

If Jesus was making an appearance at Comerica Park in Detroit next weekend, I'm willing to bet you'd make the drive, and probably pay a pretty penny for a ticket. Jesus is here every week, and the tickets are free, and His presence is gracious and salvific, even if seemingly less than overwhelming—although, remember, many at Jesus' own time left His presence unimpressed, and that to their great detriment. Jesus' presence is always a big deal, not because He is a showman, but because He is the Savior, because wherever Jesus has promised to be, there He is for Christians as the Jesus who died for your sins, and the Jesus who still gives Himself to you for you for growing in faith and living in holiness.

“For the Word of God is the sanctuary above all sanctuaries, yea, the only one which we Christians know and have,” Luther says in paragraph 5 of your inserts (*ibid.*, 607). And you know what? He's right. Whether on Sunday or Monday, in God's house or in your home, take refuge in the sanctuary of His Word, and prepare yourself to be able to do the same in trials to come. Lord knows, there's plenty to take sanctuary from, and that is precisely why He's given it to us. And I promise, time in the Word will be time well spent, for now and for later, with eternal dividends, for how could time with Christ be anything less than that? Amen.