

# INSURRECTION AND MURDER

Exodus 20:12-13

Fourth Wednesday in Lent (Series B)

March 7, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The Old Testament lesson, which we will be considering this evening, is Exodus 20, verses 12 and 13. In this very short reading, the Ten Commandments shift from teaching us to love God to love our neighbor. Please stand as you are able for the Old Testament lesson. From Exodus 10, beginning at verse 12, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>12</sup> "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> "You shall not murder.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

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

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Last week I taught you a little exercise to use in order to understand the full meaning of the commandments. We ask two questions with each commandment: *What does this commandment prohibit?* And *what does this commandment protect?* Because each of the Ten Commandments do these two things. They prohibit an evil action, and by prohibiting the evil action, they protect some good gift God has given. So we see that God's commandments are not some arbitrary rules he made up in order to take the joy of sinning out of life. They are given to protect his good gifts to us. We can think of the Ten Commandments as God's ten kind protections.

So let's apply this prohibit and protect thing to the Fourth Commandment. What does the Fourth Commandment prohibit? When it says, "Honor your father and mother," it prohibits the dishonoring or disobedience of parents. And if we understand the Ten Commandments to be a summary of all of God's Law, which I think is right, we would also include the biblical commands to obey other authorities, such as masters, employers, and the government in the Fourth Commandment. These are also biblical commandments, and they fit best in the Fourth Commandment. So when Luther explains the Fourth Commandment, he says, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise our parents *and* superiors." The Fourth Commandment, generally speaking, prohibits all forms of dishonoring, disobedience, or despising of our authorities.

Now, by prohibiting these sins, what good gifts does the Fourth Commandment protect? If we look at the commandment itself, we see that it protects long life in the land which God gives.

This promise specifically applied to the people of Israel. And this is important to recognize concerning the Law. God made a give and take covenant with Israel that was based on their obedience to the Law. This was about 1446 BC. The Mosaic Covenant, of which the Ten Commandments are a part, is the Old Covenant. The land of Israel, which God would bring these people into, was not an irrevocable gift. They could lose it, and they did. Their possession

of the land was conditioned on their obedience, and the Fourth Commandment was an example of this. If the nation obeyed God's commands, God would guarantee them peace and long life in the land. The Old Covenant, unlike the New Covenant, was conditional (Deut. 30:15-20).

So the promise of this commandment specifically applied to ancient Israel, but the general principle still holds true for you and me and everyone. Obedience to the Fourth Commandment protects God's gift of a long and peaceful life. But the Fourth Commandment only protects this gift indirectly. What the commandment directly protects is the gift of authority, beginning with parents. It is through the gift of good authority that God gives us long life and peace in this world. So the first gift that the Fourth Commandment directly protects is the family, and then, by extension, other authorities, such as teachers, employers, and government. By prohibiting dishonor and disobedience, God protects the positive influence these institutions have in our lives.

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We'll talk more about this later, but first, let's apply the prohibit and protect thing to the Fifth Commandment as well. This is one of the easier ones. When God says, "Thou shalt not kill," or, more literally, "You shall not murder," what sin is he prohibiting? This is pretty easy, he's prohibiting the sin of murder, or the unauthorized taking of human life. And by giving this commandment, what good gift is God protecting? This is also pretty easy; he's protecting the gift of life. God protects life by commanding us to not destroy it. This is pretty obvious.

So the Fifth Commandment stands out as a very important commandment. If everyone obeyed the Fifth Commandment, the world would be a better place. And if everyone disobeyed it, the world would be a very violent place, and then it would be a very empty place.

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But I would suggest to you that the Fourth Commandment is actually more important for decreasing the number of murders than the Fifth Commandment. Let me explain, because this is important.

There is a certain order to the commandments. If you take some time meditate on the order of the Ten Commandments, you'll notice a few things. Many lists are given in order of importance, and the Ten Commandments are no different. The First Commandment is, by far, the most important commandment, because obedience to the First Commandment ensures obedience to all the rest. If we fear, love, and trust in God above all things, we will keep the rest of his commandments. Obedience to God includes obedience to all of his commandments.

Another thing you will notice is a clear division of the Ten Commandments into two sections. Theologians refer to this division as the two tables of the Law. So if you ever want to impress someone with your theological chops, just drop some reference to the first and second table of the Law. These two tables have to do with love toward God and love toward our neighbor. So you'll notice that the first three commandments all have to do with love toward God, and the last seven all have to do with love toward our neighbors.

And this division of the Ten Commandments corresponds with Jesus' identification of the two greatest commandments. When a lawyer asked Jesus what the greatest commandment is, Jesus couldn't refrain from giving two. He said,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matt. 22:37-40)

So there are really two ways of summarizing God's Law. First, the Ten Commandments serve as a summary for all six-hundred and some commandments that we find in the Bible. And then these two commandments that Jesus cites are a summary of the Ten Commandments.

So the greatest commandment—love God—summarizes the first table of the Law, and the second greatest commandment—love your neighbor—summarizes the second table of the Law. These two commandments are a summary of all the Law.

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Now, I want to make this next point very clear, and I don't really know a better way of getting your attention for this than simply saying, *This is very, very important; pay attention!* Okay, are you ready? These two commandments are a summary of the *Law*. They are *not* a summary of the Bible. Last week we mentioned that the Bible has two great doctrines: the Law and the Gospel. "The Law is the divine Word which tells us what we must do" (H.U. Sverdrup, *Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism*, p. 33). And "The Gospel is the good news of the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Savior" (*ibid*, 34). The Ten Commandments are a summary of God's Law and the two greatest commandments are a summary of that summary. The commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:19) is Law. And the commandment, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart" (Deut. 6:5) is also Law. It is *not* the Gospel. These two commandments are a summary of the *Law*. And this is good. But they are *not* a summary of the entire Bible, because neither of them present the Gospel.

Now I don't know if you guys hear this as often as I do, so maybe it doesn't annoy you as much as it annoys me. It could just be that, being a full-time church person, I'm bound to hear more of what other full-time church people say. But it seems like once a month or so, I hear someone cite the two greatest commandments as the summary of the Christian faith. They say, "The Bible is just about loving God and loving our neighbors," or, "Our church just seeks to love God and love others." They have accurately summarized the Law, and that part is good, but as a whole, it's absolutely tragic, because, if this is true—if the Christian faith can be summarized in the two greatest commandments—then we are all going to hell, because none of us are capable of keeping either of these commandments as God requires.

Now, it's important to put the most charitable construction on what our neighbors say and do, and the charitable construction is that they are accurately summarizing the Law, and this is good. But if you ever hear someone present the two greatest commandments as a summary of the Bible, or the content of the Christian faith, or the mission statement of their church, that is your sign that they know nothing of Christ or the gospel. Such teaching should be avoided.

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So now that we understand that, we can consider the two tables of the Law rightly, understanding that both are Law. The First Commandment—"You shall have no other gods before me" stands as the chief commandment in the first table. And the Fourth Commandment—"Honor your father and your mother"—has a similar place in the second

table. The Fourth Commandment is really the most important commandment in the second table.

At first glance, we might think the Fifth Commandment is the most important—not murdering is essential to loving your neighbor as yourself. But let me ask you this: *Who taught you to not murder? Who taught you that you should be nice to people instead of mean? Who taught you to not hit your brothers and sisters?* For most of us, it was probably our parents. And I know there many tragic situations where children grow up with bad parents or even no parents at all. By the grace of God they might still turn out okay, but if they do, it's usually because God sent someone else into their lives to love and teach them. My point is this: If a child grows up with good parents, and if that child honors his parents, he will never be a murderer. The good parents will teach the child that murder is wrong, and the child will honor his parents by obeying them. Now that doesn't mean that having good parents will guarantee that he never murders. The child's honoring must be there too. And the honoring doesn't guarantee a good result either. The good teaching and example of the parents must also be there. But if both sides do what is commanded of them—if the parents lead, love, and teach, and if the child honors and obeys, then the Fifth Commandment will take care of itself, and so will the others.

So the Fourth Commandment is given to protect the family, and when the family is protected, our neighbors are protected too.

We saw a bad example of this in Parkland, Florida three weeks ago, when a young man walked into a school and killed seventeen people. And I know there were a lot of factors that caused this terrible tragedy, so I'm not going to pontificate on all the various proposed solutions. But since we're talking about the Fourth and Fifth Commandments today, this is low-hanging fruit. The breakdown of the family is one of the factors that led to this tragedy. The tragedy at the school was preceded by two tragedies in the home. Both of the young man's parents had died. They weren't there to lead and teach him. They weren't there to notice and intervene when the warning signs appeared. Apparently some other people noticed and tried to do something, but no one has the same access to a child as his parents.

So we see that authority is a good gift. Whether it's the authority of parents or government or everything else in between, "There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom. 13:1). Authority is a good gift from God.

And I should probably clarify a few things about that statement. First, this grates on our sinful nature. We chafe against the idea of authority. Whether it's mom and dad telling us to clean our rooms or the government telling us to pay our taxes, we don't want anyone to tell us what to do. We feel like we're smart enough to discern what is right and virtuous enough to follow through on it. Our deceptive hearts believe both of these things, but the biblical teaching is that only sometimes do we discern what is right, and we are not virtuous enough to follow through on it. So even though we chafe against authority, authority is a good thing.

Second, not every person in authority is necessarily righteous. Our rulers have the same sinful nature as the rest of us. One of the things I always teach the confirmation students is that their parents are evil (Luke 11:13). I assume this has probably gotten back to the parents, and so far I haven't received any complaints. But God still works to accomplish good things through evil people. This is true for parents, government, and everything in between. So our authorities are not perfect, and we don't have to look at them through rose colored glasses, but we are

bound to honor and respect them, especially when we disagree with them. If God's Word is to be believed—and it is—then we must believe that our authorities accomplish more good than evil. They exist to punish evil and reward good. They don't have to be perfect in order to be beneficial.

And third—and this must be understood by all who are in positions of authority, whether it's in your family, the workplace, the church, the government, or anywhere else—authority exists to benefit the people under authority, not the person in authority. Authority is not a privilege; it's a responsibility. Every position of authority is a special vocation instituted to serve those under it. In the biblical picture of hierarchy, we always find a servant at the top. In the family, parents exist to serve their children. In the congregation, pastors exist to serve the flock. The greatest example of this, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ, who lived in order to render the greatest act of service: he served us in his death. And he lives again to serve us today and forever with his gifts of salvation. Understand this about Christ—his greatest joy is not to receive our praises. That's good and all, but his greatest joy is to grant you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Authority and service are not contradictory. Good authorities are always servants of those under their authority. So when the Fourth Commandment teaches us to honor our parents and superiors, it protects the good gift their authority is to us.

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Now the Fifth Commandment. There is less that needs to be said on this, but there are, I think, three things that must be mentioned.

First, we learned from Jesus in the Gospel lesson that the Fifth Commandment prohibits more than just the final extinguishing of human life. It prohibits all deeds, words, and thoughts directed against the life of our neighbor. Whoever is angry and whoever says, "You fool!" falls under the condemnation of God and is liable to the hell of fire (Matt. 5:22). The Fifth Commandment is the one that most of us naturally think we have kept, but Jesus takes it away from us. So we find ourselves to be murders, simply on account of our thoughts. We tend to compartmentalize this as a sin against God, and it is, but our evil thoughts also have a negative impact on our neighbors, because these evil thoughts have a way of escaping through our words and deeds. When we form a habit of evil thoughts, our words and deeds soon catch up to our thoughts, and this is bad for our neighbors.

Second, we really can't talk about the Fifth Commandment without mentioning abortion and euthanasia. Maybe it makes you uncomfortable, but it has to be said. This is an area where simplicity is probably best. So I'm just going to give you a brief syllogism regarding abortion, which applies just as well to euthanasia. The first premise is this: It is wrong to intentionally take the life of an innocent human being. Both Scripture (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 20:13; etc.) and natural law reveal this to be true. Second premise: abortion takes the life of an innocent human being. And both Scripture (Ps. 139:13) and science reveal the unborn to be a human being. Conclusion: Abortion is wrong. It's as simple as that. There is much more that can be said, but I'll refrain. And I won't try to answer all the possible objections someone might raise. Maybe you don't have any objections, or maybe I would neglect the ones you do have. I would be happy to listen to them later. But for now, simplicity is best. The unborn is human, it's wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being, therefore abortion is wrong.

Third, what will become of all the murderers in the world? If what we have just said is true, then the population of murderers in the world is much higher than the number of those serving

life in prison or sitting on death row. What about all the women who were victims of the lies of the sexual revolution—that sex is free and has no consequences? What about those women who thought they had no choice? And what about the selfish men who put them in that situation? And what about all the people who have called another person a fool or something worse? And what about all those people who have simply been angry with another human being? Jesus calls them murderers (Matt. 5:22). We are all murderers, this is true. So what shall become of us?

The Law says we must die. Blood must be shed. And blood has been shed. Consider the actual sentence Jesus received. It was not merely for our minor sins that he suffered and died. If the extent of our sin is not cleaning our rooms when our parents tell us to, then perhaps a timeout would have sufficed. But Jesus didn't serve a timeout. He died. In places where the death penalty is given, it's usually reserved only for murder. If you believe your sin is too great to be forgiven, what you're really saying is that Jesus' death wasn't enough. But Jesus' death is enough. He endured the worst possible sentence in order to forgive the worst possible sins.

Remember that forgiveness always has to do with Jesus' death. Sometimes we have a weak view of forgiveness. We do something bad to someone. Then we say, "I'm sorry." And they say, "It's okay." That makes us think forgiveness is based on the other person's ability to get over it. We're forgiven when they're not mad anymore. This makes forgiveness for murder hard to fathom. But God's forgiveness is different. It's based on justice. Instead of God just getting over it, God dies for it. He actually bears the punishment for all sin and every sin. No sin was excluded from Christ's sacrifice. And this is why God is not angry with you over your sin. It was paid for. There is nothing left for God to be angry about, and he does not hold grudges. So great is Christ's mercy that he could pray for those who were murdering him, and he could say to the criminal next to him, who was receiving exactly what he deserved, **"Today you will be with me in paradise"** (Luke 23:43). Your every sin, from the First Commandment, to the Tenth, and everything in between is died for by Jesus and is forgiven. Peace be with you. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.