## Theme

**Holy Thursday, March 28, 2024 First Reading: Exodus 12:1-4[5-10]11-14 Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Gospel Reading: John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

**Sermon Title: *“So You Think You’re Not That Bad”***

*This evening our Lenten observance comes to an end, and we gather with Christians around the world to celebrate the Three Days of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Tonight we remember Christ’s last meal with his disciples, but the central focus is his commandment that we live out the promise embodied in this meal. As Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, so we are called to give and receive love in humble service to one another. Formed into a new body in Christ through this holy meal, we are transformed by the mercy we have received and carry it into the world. Departing worship in solemn silence, we anticipate the coming days.*

## Texts:

**First Reading: Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14**

1The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. 3Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. [5Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. 7They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ] 11This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the

LORD. 12For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. 13The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

14This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

## Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

23For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

## Gospel: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

1Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” 8Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” 9Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 10Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.” 11For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

12After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? 13You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

31b“Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.”

## Sermon

So you don’t think you’re that bad. You consider yourself a good person. Let's see how you feel about yourself in about 10 minutes.

The Ten Commandments have been around since the days of Moses. They were given by God to Moses to deliver to the Israelites because, contrary to what you might think about the Israelites, they were not a homogenous people, and they had been under the bondage of the Egyptians for hundreds of years, so whatever unique identity they had apart from Egyptian culture, was probably lost.

The significance of the Ten Commandments is that they are a set of codified laws given by God to establish limits and order among this ragtag cadre known as God’s “Chosen People.”

We will review them one by one in a moment, and you will probably find that you haven’t broken many if any of them. But then Martin Luther, the founder of our faith tradition came along and wrote explanations for each commandment and the thing I like about them is, while the Ten Commandments are written in the negative, “You shall not…” Martin Luther’s explanations are written in the positive. “We are to…” Listen and judge for yourself how you have done.

**The First Commandment** You shall have no other gods. **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things.

Don’t kid yourself. We have many false gods in our culture. Do you ever put your golf game ahead of worship on Saturday or Sunday? Do you pay more for your cable bill than you give to His church? How are you doing with that?

## The Second Commandment

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not curse, swear, practice magic, lie, or deceive using God’s name, but instead use that very name in every time of need to call on, pray to, praise, and give thanks to God.

I think this commandment is pretty clear and yet it is commonly broken. “GD it!” “JC!” “I swear to God!” “Oh my God” All these misuses of God’s holy name.

How are you doing with that?

## The Third Commandment

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God’s word, but instead keep that word holy and gladly hear and learn it.

How are you doing with that? I sincerely believe that I am merely a vessel for what God has for all of us. The Holy Spirit pours it into my head, and I pour it out of my mouth. Sometimes I use personal anecdotes to make the preaching more relatable, but the sermon is never about me. Are you “gladly hearing it?” Are you learning anything from it? Or are you looking at your watch wondering, “How long will he ramble on?”

**The Fourth Commandment** Honor your father and your mother. **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither despise nor anger our parents and others in authority, but instead honor, serve, obey, love, and respect them.

Carol and I are in that phase of life where our parents can frustrate us. Maybe you have been there. But it is not because we don’t love them and want what is best for them. Luther includes those in authority over us – our teachers and coaches, our supervisors and law enforcement, our appointed and elected leaders – even if we didn’t vote for them! How are you doing with that?

## The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life’s needs.

You thought you had this one for sure, didn’t you? Luther includes endangering or harming our neighbors! He says we are to help and support them in all of life’s needs. So if you hate your neighbors enough to consider killing them, Marty suggests helping and supporting them. How are you doing with that?

**The Sixth Commandment** You shall not commit adultery. **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

We are to fear and love God, so that we lead pure and decent lives in word and deed, and each of us loves and honors his or her spouse.

So maybe you’ve never cheated on your spouse. Good for you. But that isn’t enough. Do you love and honor your spouse? Do you allow yourself to have impure thoughts or objectify people who are not your spouse? How are you doing with that?

## The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither take our neighbors’ money or property nor acquire them by using shoddy merchandise or crooked deals, but instead help them to improve and protect their property and income.

Maybe you’ve never stolen anything in your life. Marty says that if you have ever taken advantage of someone, or sold shoddy merchandise you have broken the commandment. Instead, we should help our neighbor improve and protect their property and income. How are you doing with that?

## The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their

defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

Marty expands the definition of “bearing false witness” and exhorts us to come to the defense of our neighbor, speak well of them, and give them the benefit of the doubt. How are you doing with that?

## The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not try to trick our neighbors out of their inheritance or property or try to get it for ourselves by claiming to have a legal right to it and the like, but instead be of help and service to them in keeping what is theirs.

And you thought coveting meant yearning to have what your neighbor has. I can imagine someone getting into a dispute over the property line, or complaining about their kids or their dog. Marty says we are actually to help them preserve and maintain their property. Help find a solution to property issues. How are you doing with that?

## The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not entice, force, or steal away from our neighbors their spouses, household workers, or livestock, but instead urge them to stay and fulfill their responsibilities to our neighbors.

Again with the coveting, but this time the neighbor's spouse and property. Rather than doing anything to make our neighbor’s spouse or property our own, we should help them keep what is theirs. How are you doing with that?

**Conclusion**

# WHAT THEN DOES GOD SAY ABOUT ALL THESE COMMANDMENTS?

God says the following: “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we are to fear his wrath and not disobey these commandments. However, God promises grace and every good thing to all those who keep these commandments. Therefore we also are to love and trust him and gladly act according to his commands.

The LORD is speaking in hyperbole when He speaks of punishing the children for the mistakes of their parents for generations. But let’s acknowledge that children learn the value systems of their parents. We have seen how the poor decisions of parents affect the lives of their children. On the contrary, God-honoring parents pass on their god-honoring values to their children, and as they mature, they will likely live according to the value system they have learned.

So you didn’t think you were that bad a few minutes ago. How do you feel now? The Apostle Paul wrote this:

Romans 3:19Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

In other words, if we live by the law, we will be judged by the law. And God’s hoped-for outcome in giving the Law was to point out our sinfulness, leading us to seek the mercy of God.

21But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, … through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith

Paul wrote those words around 57-58 AD. Grace as we Lutherans understand it was not a culturally accepted concept back then. “An eye for an eye,” was a pretty commonly held idea of justice.

Paul, chief of sinners, as he referred to himself, was given grace upon grace from his Lord Jesus, and it radically changed his life to the point that he willingly suffered to tell others about the salvation he had received through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But tonight is not about Paul as much as it is about our Lord Jesus. It was on this night that Jesus Christ instituted what we call the Lord’s Supper. You see it was no accident that three years prior, John the Baptist saw Jesus and exclaimed, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John, being so driven by the Holy Spirit, may not have known what he was saying, but on this night Jesus made it the truth.

You heard Paul’s explanation of the Lord’s Supper in the Second Reading. It is my tradition to use those same words as the Words of Institution on Holy Thursday – so I will not read them for you again now.

Allow me to comment on my sermon title for us, *“So You Think You’re Not That Bad.*” I am not our judge, but I would give us an “F.” We failed. We are failures! And if we gave ourselves anything but an “F” we should read the Ten Commandments and Martin Luther’s explanation over again.

But I have Good News. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread of remembrance and the cup of forgiveness and told his disciples that it was his body and blood, broken and poured out for them and all people, for the forgiveness of sins. I am sure that went right over their heads. But when the meal was over, he allowed himself to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

All those commandments and Luther’s explanations that you broke … are forgiven. That is amazing grace, isn’t it?

But the conversation doesn’t end there. Paul went on to say,

Romans 6:1What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? 2By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? 3Do you not

know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:2Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

14For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

## Raisin’ the Bar Challenge

Now I admit that Paul can be difficult to understand, so let me interpret. We have been forgiven. And since that great burden has been lifted off of us, our thankful response ought to be to live our lives according to the example of the one we call the Lord of our Lives, Jesus Christ. And when we miss the mark, and we will, there’s grace for that.

It is not too much to ask, considering the grace we have been given.

## Prayer

Merciful God, we are aware that your Ten Commandments are not the Ten Suggestions or the Ten Recommendations. Nevertheless, for the most part, we have ignored them or decided which ones apply to us in our culture, and making the violation of others culturally acceptable. However, you call us to a higher standard – the standard set by the example of your Son and our Lord Jesus. Thank you for calling us to task. Now that we know better, help us to do better. We pray this in the name of the one who died to save us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen