

The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

Notice how Dr. Luther explains the Third Commandment in his Catechism. He interprets it in such a way that removes the whole sticky issue of *Sabbath*, that seventh day of rest for the Jews. We get that all wrong, anyway. We think it's about us setting aside time for God. In reality, God set aside a day of rest for us. Oh, we'll take that time off work, thank you. But that's not what a *day of rest* is all about, either. It's not just a day of rest from work, it's a day of rest from the commonness of life. God says, "*Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation*" (**Leviticus 23:3**). A *holy convocation* tells us that this is not just about resting *from* work but resting *in* the Lord.

That's what our Divine Service is, a holy convocation. This Commandment isn't about taking time off, it's about taking advantage of the time God has given us to be nourished and blessed on His Word and the Sacrament of His Son's body and blood. It's about being refreshed by meeting with our Creator.

When I joined the Lutheran church and learned that the bread and wine that we receive is not just a symbol but is actually the very body and blood of Christ, I thought, *at least as a pastor, I won't have to worry about people with sporadic attendance. These people have a very real reason to come to church that should trump every other reason to stay away.* Then, I started learning the Catechism and saw how Luther explained the Third Commandment. That breaking it was as simple as staying home from church. And fulfilling it was as simple as coming to church, listening to the Word, and receiving the sacrament in faith. That's as good as making church attendance mandatory. It's every pastor's dream to look out on Sunday morning and see his entire flock in the pews taking in the Word and feasting on the sacrament.

Then I was struck with reality. Lutherans are just like everyone else, fallen humans with sin natures that keep us from reaching our full potential. And that's what makes the Third Commandment so important. I might think I'm worshiping God on the golf course, but this is where we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament. This is where we receive the grace that we need for this life.