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Ash Wednesday

13 February 2013

Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita

Praying the Faith: The 10 Commandments

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

*“Remember, O man, you are dust;
and to dust you shall return.” (Gen 3:19)*

It’s awfully hard to forget our dustiness when we face up to the 10 Commandments.
Here we take a cold, hard look into the mirror of our sin.
We hear His words, we see our deeds; and we realize the two aren’t the same.

This happened once before.

The words were:

*“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,
but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,
for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:16-17)*

And it wasn’t but a chapter later that we hear:

*“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food,
and that it was a delight to the eyes,
and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,
she took of its fruit and ate,
and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Gen 3:6)*

There you have again the Word of God and the deed of man, and the two aren’t the same.

That’s what we call “sin.”

Not being or doing or saying the same as what God says.

Now since that first fall into sin, we’ve had a lot of practice at it.
We’ve learned to come up with excuses and cover-ups, denial and self-justification.
We’ve pretended that the judgment of death won’t *really* come,
at least not to me, not yet.

And worse yet—

we’ve begun to think that we’re actually pretty good,
that we deserve something in the end.

But what about that sin.

What about that not being and doing and saying what God has said?

There is a penalty for all that, you know.

God said it in Genesis:

“for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (2:17)

And Paul says it again in Romans,

“for the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23)

That's the verdict of God, the Law:

"Remember, O man, that you are dust; and to dust you shall return."

And so we pray.

As today's prophet Joel says,

"Who knows?" (Joel 2:14)

God might change.

He might turn, relent, repent of the disaster.

He might not punish and judge and destroy.

He might abandon His Law.

He might forget His verdict.

Who knows?

So repent! Cry out!

Put on ashes, fast, mourn, and weep!

Rend your hearts, admit your sin, confess your guilt;

face up to the 10 Words and leave nothing hidden!

Who knows?

The Lord might just hear and answer and save.

He might give peace and joy.

He might reconcile us to Himself (1 Cor 5:20).

He might provide the sacrifice. He might *be* the sacrifice.

He might keep the Law where we haven't.

He might die. He might be judged. He might be cut off—*for us*.

Who knows?

"Yet even now," says Joel.

"Behold, now is the favorable time," says Paul.

"Now is the day of salvation." (1 Cor 6:2)

Even *now*, with ashes and death written all over you—*even now!*

That's the way of our Lord.

He has no delight in your sin.

He doesn't trot out these 10 Commandments in order to parade your dusty death for fun.

He does it so that you would have another *even now*.

That's why these 10 Words are given to us.

They are given to us that we might hear again who this God is *for us*—

gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13).

He gave these words so that we might see in them His work for us.

They are *His* words; and He is the God who keeps His word.

So in our sin, we see these 10 words saying something very different than who we are.

They show us our dustiness, our fallenness, our sin and apartness.

But that's not how it is for Christ.

For Him, these 10 Words reflect who He is and what He says and does.

For Christ, these 10 Words are not the accusations of the Law or the verdict of punishment—
for Him they are life, and joy, and the proper love shared between God and man.

And central to His keeping of these Words, is His suffering for you.

The center of it all is His cross.

That's where the verdict and penalty of these 10 Commandments ends.

There the Law is fulfilled, finished, ended, done.

As we'll hear on Good Friday: *Tetelesthai!*

And that cross has been put upon you.

You are now *in Christ*.

You have been washed.

You have been sanctified.

You have been glorified in *His name*, by *His work*, and brought into *His body*.

Your ashes and dustiness,

your death and your burial,

your judgment and verdict and Law have been carried out and fulfilled in Jesus the Christ!

And they are no more!

Now because of *that*—

because of *His* sacrifice, *His* keeping of the 10 Words *for you*—

because of *that*, you can then receive these 10 Words as gift and pray.

Each of these 10 words has something to teach you about who God is in Christ.

Each gives you much to be thankful for, much to rejoice in.

Each leads us all into a confession of who we are apart from God,

to recognize our sin, and the dust of our deathly ashes.

And each of these 10 words draws us into a prayer for God to be who He is *for us* in Christ.

So with Dr. Luther, and together with ashes covering our foreheads, let us pray:

“O my God and Lord, by Your grace help me daily to better learn and comprehend Your command, and give it sincere attention. Guard my heart so that I no longer forget and become unthankful, so that I do not seek consolation in any gods on earth, nor in any creature, but rather truly cling to You, alone and purely, as my only God, my dear Lord and Father. Amen.” (17)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit