

**Midweek Lent**  
March 8, 2017  
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church  
Farmington, NM

**Exodus 34:5-7** The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

**The Second Commandment: "Love God's Name"**

Sometimes it is intentional. Sometimes it just happens and we don't even realize it. We change the way we talk depending on the crowd in which we find ourselves. That was never more obvious for me than when I was in college studying to be a pastor. Over a few summers I worked as a painter and worked alongside plenty of construction crews. After a few weeks and months, without consciously making a choice to change the way I talked, I started talking like a construction worker. I didn't even realize it until I went back to school and was surrounded by a bunch of other guys who were studying to be pastors, people who didn't talk like construction workers.

You've probably noticed the same thing. If you didn't grow up here in Farmington, but then you go back home, you almost immediately switch back over to the way everyone else talks and you used to talk back home. Most of the time we don't think too hard about our choice of words. We just do what comes naturally. Just ask any person trying to learn English. They can tell you how hard they have to concentrate when others are talking and how much effort it takes to think up and formulate the right words for a conversation. But then when they aren't thinking about it, the words of their native tongue just flow naturally.

Until we stop and think about it, we treat God's Name the same way. It just flows from our mouths. We just pick up, without realizing it, a default way of using and treating God's Name. Realizing this tendency in us, God first gave this as the second charge to his people: **"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."** (Exodus 20:7) Swearing and lying by God's name are obvious examples of abuses that just pop into our minds. But the original word used here in Exodus states that we shouldn't lift up God's Name in an empty or meaningless way. In other words, we don't want to take God's name lightly or use it without thinking.

Martin Luther explains it this way in his Large Catechism: *"Just as the First Commandment instructs the heart and teaches faith, so this commandment leads us outward and directs the lips and tongue into a right relationship with God."* (Kolb, Wengert, p. 392) So the issue with how we use or don't use God's name isn't just a matter of speech and vocabulary. It's a matter of the heart. Things are out of whack with what we say because our hearts have been knocked off their foundation. You and I, our hearts are out of sync with God's heart.

When was the last time you looked at a fire alarm? You probably don't think about them at all unless you are in the middle of a minor emergency. But when you look at that little red box, you can see the challenge for designers. They have to be accessible. They have to be easy to find and easy to use. But they can't be so accessible that toddlers will yank at that brightly colored handle. They can't be so

accessible that you brush by them and set them off. You need to be about to use it when you have a real need. But you also have to prevent pranksters from setting off false alarms.

We can think of God's Name like a fire alarm or a 9-1-1 call. So when we use God's Name to curse or swear, it's a dangerous abuse of something God gives us for our good. When we use God's Name to cover up a lie, it shows we want something we know God doesn't want for us or hasn't promised to give us. When we give in to superstition or witchcraft or dark arts, it shows our hearts don't completely trust in God to take care of us. We need to turn somewhere else to give us what our hearts are after. So we see just another example of what we saw in the First Commandment. Every time we break any Commandment, we are also breaking the First Commandment. Because every failure to completely trust in God is a slip or headlong dive into idolatry. Martin Luther explains why: *"For the first things that burst forth and emerge from the heart are words."* (Large Catechism, par 50)

If this sin like other sins breaking other Commandments isn't just a matter of obedience or action, but a matter of the heart, then the heart is what first needs to be changed to get our mouths back in sync with God. We need the new heart that can only come from Jesus Christ.

Jesus had gone through life with the humility necessary to use God's name with respect and awe. In the voice of the prophet Isaiah he says: **"The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary."** (Isaiah 50:4) And when he was challenged by the self-appointed religious leaders, he asked for any evidence that he had done anything wrong at all (John 8:46). Think back to Jesus on trial before the Jewish leaders and then before Pilate. He never cursed or swore to get out of this miscarriage of justice. He never lied to justify freeing himself from their hypocritical abuses. The prophet Isaiah tells us what would happen: **"Though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."** (Isaiah 53:9) In his moments of deepest anguish, Jesus prayed: **"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."** (Luke 22:42) Even on the cross, he didn't use God's name to call down curses or ask for vengeance. Instead, he pleaded for those ignorant and malicious souls responsible for his crucifixion: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34) And when he had suffered for every lie and deceit, every curse or swear, every betrayal of turning to superstition and satanic power, Jesus cried out: **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."** (Luke 23:46)

From this heart of love for God's Name, you and I get new hearts. The new heart from Christ's perfect obedience is the only way to get a new perspective on God's gift of his Commandments and a proper use of His Name. Moses got to hear the purpose and proclamation of God's Name from the mouth of God himself: **"Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'"** (Exodus 34:5-7) God gives his children his name for our own good.

This proper use of God's Name with take some effort and some practice. Just like you teach toddlers as they are learning to walk and grab everything in sight that the fire alarm is only for emergencies. Just like you teach children to type 9-1-1 into a phone if anything ever happens to mommy or daddy. We need to learn and practice how to use God's Name in the service of truth and good. When we are in need, call upon the compassionate and gracious God. When you are thankful for blessings, call out in praise to your Lord. When you need to learn and need to share the truth of who God is and what he does for his children, call on the name of the Lord.

And our habits can reorder and reorient our hearts. Each day is an opportunity to commend ourselves to God. Each day is a chance to practice placing ourselves in God's hands and trusting in his care. Each morning is a time to pause and thank God for life. Each evening is a time to reflect on God's protection and confess to him our faults. Let's do that today. And let's do that tomorrow. Let's make a conscious effort to switch over in our way of talking and speaking God's Name. God's Name is his gift of love to us. God gives his Name to reveal who He is for our good. God gives us his Name to call upon for beneficial purposes. As children of God, this is our native tongue, to pray, praise, and give thanks. Amen.