

Sermon 8-11-19
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Martin Luther's Small Catechism Sermon #7. The 5th Commandment

Make The Madness Stop

I found a fascinating lecture by an acknowledged historical expert on Russia, the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin by the name of Stephen Kotkin. He argues that there are four characteristics to a modern authoritarian state. First an authoritarian state has to have a repression mechanism to combat dissent. The repression mechanism can't be too centralized lest it eventually turn on the leader. So, it's effective for the leader to set conflicting overlapping jurisdictions for these ministries of repression.

Second, an authoritarian regime needs cash flow. Usually, the economy of such a state is really not strong enough to support the regime. So, the regime needs cash flowing through the world banking system to support itself. This is why financial sanctions can easily strangle an authoritarian regime such as Iran's.

Third, the regime needs control over the life choices of its citizens. And for my purposes this morning, this is the most important one. Free societies, like the U.S. still mostly is, offer their citizens a wide variety of life choices. Go into business. Go into the professions. Live where you want. Vacation where you want. Choose the doctor you want. But life-choices are a distinct threat to authoritarian regimes because they signify freedom. Therefore, authoritarian regimes reel in life-choices. China, for instance, is now instituting a massive surveillance system that grades its citizens on what the regime considers good behavior. Life choices of school, job, living location and much more will depend on the Chinese citizen's loyalty to the regime's standards.

Fourth, an authoritarian regime needs a web of deceitful but persuasive stories to remain in power and justify its excesses. To this day, Joseph Stalin, the worst mass murderer of the 20th century, perhaps surpassed only by Mao Zedong, is still fondly remembered in Russia as Papa Stalin, the hero who defeated the German invaders in World War II.

The reason I want to focus on life choices is that I believe we have been going through at least a decade of shrinking life choices in the U.S. A good deal of the shrinkage is because of the globalist economic policies pursued by Western nations for at least the last fifty years. As a result, vast rural sections of the country have been laid waste economically. The jobs disappeared overseas. There is no work. Thus, life choices are drastically curtailed.

Then, there's the threat of artificial intelligence. Stop & Shop now has a tall lumbering robot with google eyes in the store. So far it's only reporting messes – successfully or not, I don't know. But ultimately it's a threat to jobs.

Then there's the ideological poison we're being fed. We're being told that we're destroying the planet. The human race has no future here unless we take actions to radically limit life choices for all – except the elites.

We're also being told that the founding of the U.S. was evil. It was founded by slaveholders, misogynists, white supremacists, etc. And this evil is deeply embedded in the system. Therefore, freedom of life choices must be curtailed in order to fundamentally change the country.

So, as young people – especially men – come of age in their teens and twenties at this time, they're being shown the bleak landscape of a nihilistic, dystopian future full of victims of which they are but one. This picture is not necessarily true, but it's part of the deceitful story telling by the elites who now propose that young people give them the political power to "set things right."

Now, the real way to set things right is to expand righteous life choices, not shrink them. But that doesn't fit into the authoritarian plans of those who would build utopias.

Utopia builders are extremely angry people. They are enraged that the world is filled with difficulties, inequalities, human evil and especially suffering. They believe we are all victims of a cosmic conspiracy of history or whatever. Therefore, they propose to play God, violently sweep it all away and rebuild a world where there is no suffering – a paradise, a utopia. But life choices must be shrunk.

As factual reporting is being done on last weekend's two mass murderers, it's slowly becoming clear that each young man – for different reasons – believed himself a victim living in a dystopian world. At some point in his past, he decided that he was just the person to begin to set things straight by doing his part to sweep it all away. He would sacrifice himself in the process. And so he began to plot his going to glory in a murderous exit.

There are additional factors in this. I think the first is best expressed by Steve Turner's poem, "Chance" that we saw two weeks ago.

Postscript – If chance be the father of all flesh, then disaster is his
rainbow in the sky. And when you hear, "State of emergency, sniper
kills ten, troops on a rampage, youths go looting, bomb blasts school,"
it is but the sound of man worshipping his maker.

So, if paganism is correct and blind impersonal chance is the creator of everything, then the rage of the utopia builders against this present world and their desire to take control of it is justifiable. And we should not be surprised at all the violence. For, what meaning, what purpose does blind chance bring to the human soul? How can it instruct us to love our neighbors as ourselves? What does it know about life? How can it know anything?

Finally, there is the one that Jesus spoke of in John 8:44, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Therefore, put together shrinking life choices, poisonous ideology, the Marxist worldview that everything is about power, paganism and the devil and we come up with the present mass violence by mostly young men.

Some say that guns are the problem. Well, in very gun-controlled, merry England, London is continuously plagued with mass stabbings instead of mass shootings. In London's case Islam is usually the culprit. For, earthly utopia brought about by violence is also an Islamic concept. When all unbelievers have been

murdered or converted, then Islamic utopia will automatically set in. Thus, there are radical young men seeking Islamic utopia.

The problem has nothing to do with automatic rifles. For, knives will do just as well. No. The problem is the original sin by which we define good and evil for ourselves. Political cartoonist, Pat Cross, in a cartoon titled "Progressive Bible" shows Adam in the Garden of Eden eating an apple and facing up to God in a white cloud while an AR-15 rifle is hanging from a tree next to him. Adam is pointing at the gun and saying to God, "The gun told me to do it."

The madness would instantly stop if all alive heeded some very simple words from Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder." But, who sez we shouldn't murder? Sez the one who appeared in thick darkness, lightning and smoke on Mount Sinai and spoke with a voice like a giant trumpet blast. But He hasn't been seen like that for millennia.

Sez the crucified one who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, speaking in Matthew 5:44-45, "44 'But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.'" And again in Luke 6:35-36, "35 'But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.'" But Jesus hasn't been seen in centuries either.

Nevertheless, it says in Psalm 19:1-4, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." We're invited to answer the question of Isaiah 40:26, "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?"

But the pagan religion taught in our schools declares that the universe itself is uncreated eternal and infinite. All its structures can be explained by natural laws – known or unknown. So, who sez, "You should not murder?"

Under pagan ideology only government can stop murder. But does a government have to? No. The government itself can murder those who oppose its latest vision of utopia. Just ask those living under atheist pagan ideologies in China, North Korea, Cuba and other places.

Murder declines wherever free human beings fear their Creator. It declines even more wherever free human beings know their Messiah. For as it is written in Colossians 3:9-10, "9... you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." This new self is the gracious gift every human being receives if they repent of their original sin and receive Messiah Jesus.

Indeed, to be renewed in the Image of our Creator is the greatest unmerited gift any rebellious, sinful human being can ever receive. It means to be restored to the complete righteousness Adam and Eve had before they fell into sin and took us down with them. It means to be completely in sync with our Creator's definitions of

good and evil and able to function in them. To restore us to the Image of our Creator is the very thing Jesus Christ came to accomplish for us.

Therefore, in the resurrection of the dead, this wonderful gift will fully belong to every believer in Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glory. But notice Colossians says that Christians already have taken off their old sinful self along with its rebellions practices and have put on the new self. However, in this life on this earth the Word says that we're only in the *process of being renewed* in the Image of our Creator, not fully renewed. Being fully renewed will not take place until the resurrection. Therefore, the sinful nature – though considered by God dead in Christ – still stands in our way. Our attempts at God's true righteousness are weak at best. Nevertheless, Lord Holy Spirit has the power to lead the believer even into the alien territory of doing good, praying for and loving our enemies. For this is how our Creator does things in the present age.

In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther instructed father's to teach their children this simple explanation of the fifth commandment:

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

It's not enough not to murder. Scripture instructs us that it is righteous for Christians to build hospitals, establish food banks, provide shelter in whatever way we can and aid others in tending to the needs of this life. It's righteous to do this even for our enemies. In God's economy of things we won't lose out.

Now, is it ever right for the state to kill? We read in Leviticus 24:17, "If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death." However, Scripture declares that capital punishment is not to be dispensed cavalierly. Thus, we read in Numbers 35:30, "Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness." Indeed, this was the reason the Sanhedrin could not condemn Jesus to death on the basis of the witnesses they brought to His trial. They could not get two witnesses to agree.

But nowhere does Scripture grant the state, the church or any other group a right to use murder, execution, terrorism or insurrection to bring in utopia or even the Kingdom of God. This is what absolutely distinguishes Christianity from Marxism and from Islam.

Instead, a country founded on the principles of Christianity, as the United States originally was, maximizes the opportunity for life decision – the freedom to succeed and the freedom to fail. It does this equally for all its citizens. Such a country will establish law in line with divine Law to curb the activity of those intent on evil doing as Yahweh defines it. In other words, the state should constrain evil life decisions so that righteous life decisions may flourish. And the difference between evil and righteous is determined not by the will of the majority or an elite, but by the decrees of our Creator.

However, in our time we are in danger. As the Answers in Genesis foundation notes, the removal of the Ten Commandments in our society began with the now hundred year old attack on the Six Days of Creation. Therefore, we are now in danger from whatever “good” a majority can be convinced is “good.” This happened in Russia – a Christian country – in 1917. It’s happened elsewhere since and can happen here.

If our politicians were serious about curtailing murder of all kinds they wouldn’t worry about weapons. Instead, they would promote the Christian religion. They would get rid of the paganism forcibly taught as science in our schools so that the message of the Creator God and His Messiah could once again come through to the general public. School districts would be allowed to post the Ten Commandments in their classrooms like New York City did in the 1920’s. Velma’s late father, George, remembered that. Teachers would be allowed to focus attention on those commandments for the greater good of all.

And as for Christ’s church – the Dayton shooter had something in his manifesto to the effect that he was going to hell and not coming back. It sounds like he was firmly in the devil’s grip. Nevertheless, Christ died even for such men as this. Consequently, over the years I’ve heard many testimonies of those whose lives were drastically changed from great evil to the love of God. Therefore, let us rededicate ourselves to this purpose – getting the message of God’s great hope for humanity in Jesus Christ out to as many people as possible. This we can and will do by the grace of God. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.