

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! And Happy Holidays! Can you believe I just put that?!—I literally worked myself through college and seminary so that I didn't have to work at Wal-Mart as a cashier where I'm forced to say that phrase instead of "Merry Christmas," and here I am writing it to you! What a hypocrite I am!—Or am I? Believe it or not, Luther's commentary regarding the Third Commandment has an entire section on the word "holiday," as well as what it means to truly honor the Sabbath day. Let's take a look!

“Happy Holidays”???

“Holiday” as originally used meant a “holy day (Book of Concord, p.396).” So how does that connect to the Sabbath? Well, as you might know from Genesis, God took a Sabbath, a day of rest, after He created the universe and everything in it. Yet it does not mean He did nothing, since even Christ taught that minor bits of work could be done even on the Sabbath. A true Sabbath, then, is one on which a person takes a rest from doing heavy work so that his or her body may rest, and at the same time, the person devotes him or herself to God's Word. That is how a Sabbath is made a holiday, or holy day.

Many parts of these concepts are abused today, if not the concepts in total. How many of you have a full day off for your body to rest (again, from major work)? Granted we now worship on Sunday (as from “ancient times (Luther, BoC, p. 398)”) as opposed to Saturday, but that is because Christ was raised on Sunday. But which day is the day of worship does not matter—in fact, it used to be common practice to have worship every day. Even Luther acknowledges that the common person cannot do this—thus, the single holiday, the day of Sabbath rest, the day(s) which we do not honor the way we should.

I know that our society is changing; you've probably heard me complain that we used to have Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights sacred for Church services. But is society the only thing keeping you from coming? If you should have a Sunday off, do you go to Church and hear God's Word to make it a holiday, rather than just a day off? Or do you sleep in instead? Granted nothing is wrong with sleep, and rest is needed, but could you not nap in the afternoon or go to bed earlier? Or for those who cannot make it to Sunday morning services, do you go to the Saturday night ones? I know that there are some churches around which offer those. Granted I wish you could come to your home church here at Augsburg, but I would rather you go to a Saturday night service each week than to never hear God's Word either here or there—and, more importantly, so would God.

Last month in December, we heard how our Lord Jesus Christ came to be the babe in the manger. You already know why. He came headed for the cross. He died there because you do not honor the Sabbath as you should. By His work, you have been made holy again. Will you let His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of God, work in you to sanctify you through the preaching of God's Word on your holidays, or will you let Satan devour you? Yes, Augsburg, there is a God who loves you and desires the best for you even sending very His Son for you; but there is also a devil who hates you and God and desires the worst for you sending his demons into the world to lead you anywhere but to God's Word—the only place you can hear the saving Gospel of Christ's death for you. “Joy to the World, the Lord has come, let earth receive her King”—and let us receive Him as well, in and through God's Spirit for the sake of Christ born, crucified, and risen for you.

Happy Holidays! (Christmas, and weekly!)

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh