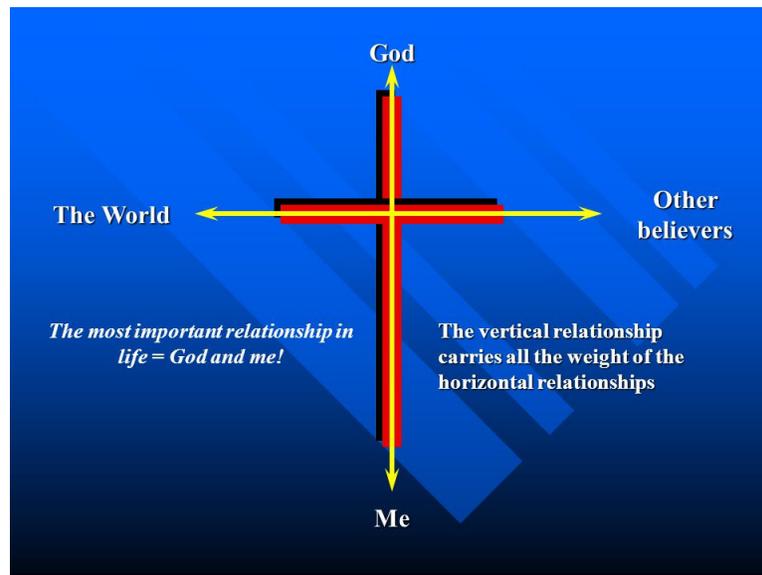


Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! February is the month many of us associate with love. We might recall the sacrifice of St. Valentine, or we may have a special someone to bestow the feeling upon. But all of us, married or single, have received true love. That is the gift of our Heavenly Father through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. We'll consider that great love as we continue through Luther's Large Catechism, learning about the Lord's Prayer.



Last month we read that the Second Petition is that God's kingdom come among us. It comes among us and benefits us through the faith that we have received. "We ask here at the outset that all this may be realized in us and that his name may be praised through God's holy Word and Christian living. This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and also in order that it may find approval and gain followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom that has now begun (BoC, p.447)."

This petition and the Second Commandment are closely linked in that they both are involved with God's Word doing His work among us. As we learn from Isaiah, God's Word won't return without doing what He sent it to do. And we also, through God's gift to us of faith, desire for His Word to do its work on us, and those around us, and those throughout the world.

We want God's Word to work on us so that we do not lose the faith that we have been given, but rather that we would be strengthened and grow in that faith, maturing as God's dear children. That maturation takes place so that we might know how to reach out to others with God's Word, that they, too, might come to saving faith.

At the same time, we desire that God's Word would do His work in those around us. This Sunday we heard from the commentator Lenski that God does not "picture love in ideal surroundings of friendship and affection where each individual embraces and kisses the other but in the hard surroundings of a bad world and a faulty church where distressing influences bring out the positive power and value of love (Lenski's Commentary on 1 Corinthians, p.555.)" Life is not always easy—in fact, it rarely is, *even* in the church, as Lenski points out. So we pray in this petition that God would continue to work in us and each other so that we might live together in His love. His love is the only true love which denies self and rejoices with the truth (1 Corinthians 13).

We pray this petition not only for ourselves and those near to us, but for all people everywhere. Love rejoices with the truth, and in the hearing of the truth by all others (1 Cor. 13). It is in the hearing of the truth that God can work in the hearts of us all to grow us in faith and in love toward Him and toward one another. "In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom that has now begun (BoC, p.447)."

As we learned back in catechism classes (and continue to learn as we go back to our catechisms!) the kingdom of grace is how God deals with us—not according to our sin, but out of His great love for us. It is the kingdom where we dwell securely in His presence because of the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ. In it, we receive together the Word of Law and Gospel, the Sacrament of the Altar, and we remember being Baptized. Sin, the devil, this world, and our own sinful flesh have no claim on us because we were baptized into Christ! In Jesus' Name. Amen!

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh