

Rebirth: “Ongoing Conversion”  
“God Lives In You”  
Ezekiel 34:1-7a  
Psalm 115  
1 Peter 3:13-22  
John 14:15-21

Jesus is with us, accompanying us, and transforming us. If you love Jesus...then what? If you describe what loving Jesus looks like in the indicative mood, you describe the way things are. But if you use the imperative mood, you describe the way things ought to be. For example, loving Jesus sees hungry people. Loving Jesus feeds hungry people. Loving Jesus matters. “The gift that overcomes the world’s exclusions—the horrible disjunctions between life as we imagine it realistically and life as it might be—is the loving that God is...the infinite love for the world that we are commanded to enact.”<sup>1</sup> In a *Simple Way to Pray* (1535) Martin Luther writes,

Since I had time and opportunity to go through the Lord’s Prayer, I’ll do the same with the Ten Commandments.

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<sup>1</sup>Larry B. Bouchard in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2 (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 494.

I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer.

[Luther demonstrates his approach for the first commandment, “I am the Lord your God. ... You shall have no other gods before me.”] Here I earnestly consider that God expects and teaches me to trust him sincerely in all things and that it is his most earnest purpose to be my God. I must think of him in this way at the risk of losing eternal salvation. My heart must not build upon anything else or trust in any other thing, be it wealth, prestige, wisdom, might, piety, or anything else.

Second, I give thanks for his infinite compassion by which he has come to me in such a fatherly way and, unasked, unbidden, and unmerited, has offered to be my God, to care for me, and to be my comfort, guardian, help, and strength in every time of need. We poor mortals have sought so many gods and would have to seek them still if he did not enable us to hear him openly tell us in our own language that he intends to be our God. How could we ever-in all eternity-thank him enough!

Third, I confess and acknowledge my great sin and ingratitude for having so shamefully despised such sublime teachings and such a precious gift throughout my whole life, and for having fearfully provoked his wrath by countless acts of idolatry. I repent of these and ask for his grace.

Fourth, I pray and say, “O my God and Lord, help me by thy grace to learn and understand thy commandments more fully every day and to live by them in sincere confidence. Preserve my heart so that I shall never again become forgetful and ungrateful, that I may never seek after other gods or other consolation on earth or in any creature, but cling truly and solely to thee, my only God. Amen, dear Lord, and Father. Amen.”

These are the Ten Commandments in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book. They are intended to help the heart come to itself and grow zealous in prayer.<sup>2</sup>

To live the Lord’s Prayer is a matter of believing that God lives in you. The Lord’s Prayer gives life. It does not take it away. Only by trusting God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), do you have the strength to obey, receive God’s instruction, give thanks, confess your sin, and acknowledge

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<sup>2</sup>Found in “Martin Luther--Later Years and Legacy,” *Christian History*, no. 39. I often use the website [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com) to assist me in finding illustrations.

God's grace for you.

Ezekiel 34:1-7a, Psalm 115, 1 Peter 3:13-22, and John 14:15-21 make this observation: doing good has God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as we know in and through Jesus Christ, as its foundation.

Look around you this morning. You see familiar faces and some new ones. Jesus promises to be "in" us. That is the benefit of placing your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Two points for your consideration. **First, "in" is a tiny word.** Two letters make up the word. It's a preposition. But it is the "subject" that makes the word "in" so incredible. God, the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of life dwells, that is, lives in each one of us. The God of the universe lives "in" those who love God and love others, even when the world appears to be spinning out of control. **Second, Jesus was not passive toward his teachings. Jesus was active.** Think of all the time spent with the sick, outcast, and marginalized in society. Recall the discussions about the void of religion. When we remember Jesus, we do not remember him praying, but being a person of action.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God and love others. That is a profound summation of the Ten Commandments. How many times have you and I heard something like this, "You ought to do better at loving God and others." Or "You out to take instruction in basic Christianity more seriously." Or "You ought to be more thankful for God's grace and mercy in your life." Or "You ought to be less hypocritical." Or "You ought to pray more." When we love God and others, "ought" is reality. When we take instruction in basic

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<sup>3</sup>In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of David J. Schlafer, Bridgett A. Green, Gail Ramshaw, Jerry L. Sumney, Brian S. Powers, Philip Wingeier-Rayo, and Lindsay P. Armstrong as found in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 271-274, 274-276, 277-278, 279-281, 281-282, 283-285, and 285-286.

Christianity, “ought” is reality. When we are thankful for God’s grace and mercy in our lives, “ought” is reality. When we pray, “ought” is reality. When we put love in action, “ought” is reality. Love in action is a church that gathers and scatters; where fans are turned into followers and consumers become missionaries; where inclusion is, and people live in authentic intergenerational community.<sup>4</sup>

The act of worship is our response as individuals and a community to God’s love, grace, and mercy. It is during worship, focusing our attention on God, that we can most clearly experience rebirth that is ongoing conversion. Worship is an act of obedience on our part to fulfill Jesus’ mandate that we are to worship God in spirit and in truth. Worshipping at a particular church is about the community you have with the other worshippers. You’re on a common journey, a journey to become more like Jesus.

Remember, your Baptism is not an act that instantly makes all things right. It is true that Baptism is a sign and seal of our salvation Baptism joins us in hope with Christ. So, if you’re tired of religion and want to be blown away by Jesus living “in” you and others; if you want to put the action of Jesus in action; and if you want to be a part of a community who love doing and being church; then join us at Geneva in rejecting a consumer approach to church, which consistently attempts to recreate the church of the past that can never be again nor should it. Join with us instituting a discipleship and experience based intergenerational approach to our ministry and living as a community of faith.

God lives in you. You are created by God, redeemed by God, and will forever be sustained by God. Remember, your rebirth in Christ is an ongoing conversion, which is transformational for you, others, and society. Love wins. Death loses. Amen!

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<sup>4</sup>These concepts are gleaned from Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *AND: The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 26.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person and Livestream congregations)  
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