

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/13/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

When my kids were young, we had a saying that was used in our family whenever someone was speaking unkindly about someone else—even someone not part of the family. That saying was, “Eighth Commandment it.” The motivation for the saying was Martin Luther’s explanation to the Eighth Commandment from The Small Catechism. (I’m sure all of you, or at least all of you who grew up Lutheran and went through confirmation, remember Luther’s explanation to the Commandments.) Marth Luther wrote an explanation for each of the Ten Commandments to help parents teach them to their children. For those of you who may not know or may not remember, let me share with you the explanation for that Eighth Commandment, but first the Eighth Commandment itself: *You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor*. Luther’s explanation, then, goes like this:

We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.

So, when we said, “Eighth Commandment it” in our family, we were reminding the person who was speaking meanly about someone else that this is not what God wants from us in how we think and talk about others. More than this, we encouraged one another to try to put the other’s actions in the best possible light. It was a helpful practice as the kids were growing up, and even today, we will occasionally say it to one another. But truth be told, it does have to be said periodically, and I even have to remind myself to do this.

When I’m driving, someone will cut in front of me, and I begin to think about the person’s insensitivity and downright rudeness for this dangerous and disrespectful action. Unkind ideas about the person spring to mind, at times affecting my whole attitude. Perhaps this even becomes the source of road rage for some (not me, I pray).

But things change if I remember to “Eighth Commandment it.” Then I begin to consider why the person might have done this, trying to “defend” her/him, and “explain everything in the kindest way.” Perhaps he was rushing home because his wife was in labor. Maybe she needs to get to school to pick up a sick child. Might it be that a friend is in crisis and needs some support or assistance. Could it be something as simple as being late for work? Sometimes after Eighth Commandment-ing it, I find myself praying for the person asking for safe travels and positive outcomes for whatever it is that is causing him/her to rush so.

We would all do well to recognize opportunities to “Eighth Commandment it” more often throughout our days. When we hear others speaking ill of someone else, we might even encourage them to find better ways to talk about the person or offer our own defense for the person. Often, we don’t know the whole story and are simply reacting to our own discomfort or annoyance over a situation. If we are going to follow Jesus’ call to “love one another as I have loved you,” one of the best ways to start is to take time to “Eighth Commandment it!”

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey