

August 16, 2015
Proverbs 9:10; Hebrews 11:3

Proper 15B
The Providing God

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's been over a year that I have been with you all and what a year it has been. I've been trying to get used to the wind and the lack of trees. As I've driven the countryside over the past year there is something that continues to amaze me. The vastness of God's creation. You can see for miles. Also the miles upon miles of farm fields, whether they be wheat, soybeans, corn, sunflowers, or sugar beets. Or I look up at the sky and you can see the vast number of stars in the expanse. God's creation is beyond a doubt an amazing gift to you and me.

As I think about God's amazing and extraordinary creation, I can't help but think how gracious our God is. He gives us everything for our wellbeing. God's creation is indeed a great gift a great gift that needs to be taken care of. Many of you work the ground, whether it be your livelihood or a hobby, and I can't thank you enough. You are part of the process that God uses to take care of all people. As you work the ground, you are fulfilling one of the first commands that God gave: *have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.*¹ As you take care of the earth, you are involved as a steward. Over the next few weeks we are going to be looking at the Apostles Creed and see how gracious our God is and how you and I are to respond to His gracious gifts.

As we begin our text is twofold this morning, first from the Old Testament lesson. ¹⁰ *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.* ² Then from the letter to the Hebrews: ³ *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.* ³

Martin Luther states in the Large Catechism: "To state it quite briefly, the Creed teaches us to know Him fully." As we learn the creed we gain knowledge of the Holy One, we have a greater fear of the Lord. A holy and healthy fear of the Lord.

As we continue to learn about who God is, we have an even greater fear and awe of the Almighty God. We embark on this journey to answer the questions that Luther poses in the Large Catechism: "What kind of person is God? What does He do? How can we praise, or show and describe Him, that He may be known?"

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ge 1:28). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Pr 9:10). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Heb 11:3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

God is first off our Father Almighty. He is the one that provides for our every need. He does this by being the maker of heaven and earth. He takes care of our creaturely life. James Nestingen writes in a paper: "Creaturely life is shaped by the gifts provided—"food and clothing, home and family, daily work and everything else I need"—and by the ongoing experience of the obligation."

Obligation? What does that mean? Doesn't God just give us these gifts for our benefit? I thought we frowned on doing things for our salvation. Partially yes, we don't have to do anything for our salvation, that comes next week when we focus on the second article. God does give us these gifts for our benefit. Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "He causes all created things to serve for uses and necessities of life," but there is an obligation. It's an obligation of stewardship. He gave us that command right after he created man and woman: Be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth. There's also the obligation that comes in the Ten Commandments. These Ten Commandments precede in Luther's Catechisms and rightfully so. The Ten Commandments teach us how we are to live before God and one another. These are commands, obligations of God. Obligations that none of us can fully fulfill.

As we think about our obligation, must notably the obligation of having dominion, doesn't that mean you and I actually own nothing, but that we are placed here to be stewards over God's creation? Everything is actually God's, but He wants us and commands us to take care of it. Have you and I actually done our part completely and successfully. It is after all our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

We are summoned to thank and praise, serve and obey Him, but yet we don't do this. Luther goes on to write in the Large Catechism: "For we all pass over it, hear it, and say it. Yet we do not see or consider what the words teach us. For if we believed this teaching with the heart, we would also act according to it. We would not strut around proudly, act defiantly, and boast as though we had life, riches, power, honor, and such, of ourselves." James 4:13-16 states: *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"-¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.* We then continue to read in the Large Catechism: "We would not act as though others must fear and serve us, as is the practice of this wretched, perverse world. The world is drowned in blindness and abuses all the good things and God's gifts only for its own pride, greed, lust, and luxury. It never once thinks about God, so as to thank Him or acknowledge Him as Lord and Creator.

Now both from Holy Scripture and the Catechism are tough words. How often does our own sin of pride, greed, lust, and luxury get in the way of our relationship with God? How often do we fall into the ways of this world and just give up on our Giving and Creating God? How often do we think that we deserve so many good things, when in fact we don't?

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we fall into the ways of the world all the time. We don't live according to what we confess with our mouth. It's a troubling thing when the good gifts that God has given to us become our crutch, our sins, and our idols. Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "For we sin daily with eyes, ears, hands, body and soul, money and possessions, and with everything we have." We are sinners and we sin much and often.

We beg and we plead to get more and more and more. Even if what we have actually is enough. It's what we are taught by society. We are taught that bigger and better is what we need. We fail to see what the importance of God's good gifts are to us.

My dear fellow redeemed Saints of God, part of serving and obeying God that we confess in the meaning of this article is our joyous giving back to God. God gave us dominion over all of creation. God entrusted to us His creation. By this train of thought we are all trustees by definition. As we are all trustees, we are then all stewards of God's creation. One definition of steward is: someone who protects or is responsible for money, property, etc. So by this definition we are God's stewards. We are stewards of God's creation.

We are given the job of stewardship of God's good gifts to us. Our church body defines Christian Stewardship in this way: Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes. Really what God has given to you is actually still God's; for we are managers, trustees, stewards of His good gifts.

My dear family of God, being Christian Stewards is basically who we are as God's Baptized and Redeemed Children. God's Children who are bought by the blood of Jesus. How as God's Baptized and Redeemed people do we find stewardship so difficult? We find it difficult because it goes against our sinful and natural inclination. It goes against our thinking that what I have is mine to do with what I want. In the October 2013 Synod Stewardship Newsletter the following is written: How can we who have been given everything—life, food, clothing, house, home, forgiveness, divine sonship, an eternal inheritance—be so stingy with what we give to the church, the place where we hear about and receive all that God gives us and does for us? We are all guilty of this kind of thinking. And the only godly response is to repent and trust in the Gospel.

Dear fellow redeemed saints of God, we are all guilty. But yet God still provides, he still loves us. He still gives us what we need to support this body and life. He still preserves our life and protects and defends us from all evil. Our God is a loving Father who loves us and takes care of us. Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "For here we see how the Father has given Himself to us, together with all creatures, and has most richly provided for us in this life. We see that HE has overwhelmed us with unspeakable, eternal treasures by His Son and the Holy Spirit, as we shall hear."

God provides us with the good gifts of His creation, with our daily bread. God provides us with giving of Himself. God gave up everything including His very own Son, our

Savior Jesus Christ. He gave His Son to death and the grave so that He might defeat sin, death, and the grave and live again, so that He can graciously give us our new life in Christ, and our new life that is yet to come in this coming Kingdom.

For if God has given you His own Son, will He not give you all things? Yes. He will. This is His sure and certain promise. God provides for His people. He provides everything we need for this body and life and for the life that is to come.

God creates you and provides for you. He uses the seed and soil, the beet farmer and the dairy farmer. He uses the millhand, the milkman, the grocer and the checkout person to provide for you. He uses so much to provide for you and we believe this all by faith. And by faith given to us we understand that God created everything for you and me. And as we continue to understand who God is, we also gain more wisdom and insight.

In the Name of our Creating and giving God. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.