

Habitus

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; 2 Peter 3:8-13; Matthew 24:36-51

[*anno domini*]

I will get to what a *habitus* is, but I need to lay some groundwork first. I bet you haven't heard the phrase "the year of our Lord" lately. And that's a shame. Every once in a while, I run into that phrase while I'm reading a blog or journal article or letter from a pastor. And then I always think, "I should use that phrase myself," and then I don't use it. It comes from the Latin, *anno domini*, which you know as 'A.D.' Now academics and the like use 'BCE' and 'CE' to refer to 'Before Common Era' and 'Common Era' as if they could erase any reference to our Lord. But if you use 'BC' and 'AD,' people still know what you mean. And if you use 'in the year of our Lord,' there's no mistaking what you mean! This phrase is a great reminder that time belongs *not* to us, but to our Lord. That's always a good thing to remember. That's the first thing to remember when dealing with *habitus* is the fact that time is our Lord's time and not ours. And that's especially important because our Lord is coming back in judgment!

[the second coming of our Lord]

Our Lord reminds us that He is coming back at any time in judgment in our Gospel reading tonight. He says:

"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." (Matthew 24:36–39)

Our Lord teaches us that He could come at any time and that things will look more or less normal.

In other places that Jesus talks about His second coming, it seems that we will know things have gotten worse right before the end, but this passage in Matthew 24 gives me pause on whether we'll know that the end is near. But we do know it's coming. And Jesus warns us so that we'll not be taken unawares.

Far too often the delights of the flesh lure Christians away from the church and away from their faith. Christ returning will be a horrible day for them when they're cast into the place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Our Lord desires our eternal salvation so He gives us fair warning.

Now, many may look at this second coming of Jesus as a fearful master who looks at our every move to see where we mess up! Don't mess up or Jesus is gonna get you! We know better. Our Lord will judge everyone at the end of time, and that is a fearful prospect, but Jesus wants to be known primarily for His love and mercy and not His judgment. But you can only know God is loving and merciful if you know your salvation is a done thing. This is the most beautiful thing about Lutheranism. You can know without a shadow of a doubt that your salvation is secure. You've been judged righteous already and there's nothing you can do to ruin it. That doesn't mean our Lord won't apply some Law to you when you need a swift kick in the rear, but it does mean you *can* live a life of true freedom. You live this life of freedom trusting in the means of Grace, the Word of God and the Sacraments, instead of trusting in your emotions or works.

Luther had a beautiful definition of who God is in his explanation of the first commandment in the Large Catechism:

"A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the [whole] heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol." (LC I.2)

When you have confidence and faith in Jesus, you live in true freedom. So first, we know that our time belongs to the Lord and second, we know that our Lord is coming back at any time. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts. And God's perspective on time is not our perspective of time.

[time from God's perspective]

St. Peter warns us:

“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:8-9)

We are an impatient people. We want answer to prayer *now*. Once we get to a certain age, we want our Lord to come *now*. We seem to easily forget that God made Israel wander in the wilderness for 40 years, that God kept Israel in Exile for 70 years, that God didn't send any prophets to His people for 400 years in between the Old and New Testament. God's purposes always revolve around two things: the work of Christ and the salvation of the sinner. Christ was promised at the beginning of the fall into sin, Christ came and did His work on behalf of sinners, and Christ will come again. He did all this and continues to work on behalf of sinners so that they might be saved. God gives an amazing promise to His children.

God promises you that He will work everything *for* your good. (Romans 8:28) You know that it is for your good and that doesn't mean it will be pleasant to go through! He promises things will work out for your good, but He doesn't say when that will happen. He will work it out *for* your good in His time and not yours! Joseph clung to the promises of God while he was unjustly jailed for not sleeping with Potiphor's wife. But God used him mightily to save His people from famine.

First, we know that our time belongs to the Lord and second, we know that our Lord is coming back at any time and third, we know that God's timing is His and is for our good. The fourth thing we need to know is that there is an ebb and flow to time.

[the ebb and flow of time]

The beautiful passage in Ecclesiastes teaches us that we are meant to do different things at different times of our lives.

^{3.2} a time to be born, and a time to die;
 a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;
 a time to break down, and a time to build up;
⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
 a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
 a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;
 a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;
 a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;
 a time for war, and a time for peace.

I really wanted to summarize that, but how do you summarize such beautiful poetry? There is definitely a time for all these things under heaven. We know this from experience. When you have young kids, there's very little else you can do in life. And that is a good thing. Kids are a gift from the Lord and a huge responsibility. But typically you have the energy for them. As a grandparent you have enough energy to give them back to their parents. When you're younger, you can help out a lot more at church. As you get older, you may not be able to help out as much. When you're younger, it's usually wise to build wealth. When you're older, it's definitely wise to build up the younger generation. You live differently when you're country is in war or experiencing a famine.

There's obviously an ebb and flow of time, but what should determine what you do? As you've heard from me many times, the need of your neighbor determines what you do. And this starts with your closest neighbors in your house. And this will vary according to your season in life.

So first, we know that our time belongs to the Lord and second, we know that our Lord is coming back at any time and third, we know that God's timing is His and is for the best and fourth we know is that there is an ebb and flow to time. This foundation is necessary for developing a proper *habitus*.

[what's *habitus*?]

So what's *habitus*? One simple way to look at it is to consider your *habitus* your daily habits. And this makes sense. You know that if you want to lose weight you cannot just eat wisely only one day or workout only one day. Eating well and physical activity must be consistent habits for weight to come off and stay off. Another example is learning a subject or foreign language. You know that one or two cram sessions isn't going to give you real knowledge. You must have consistent study daily to master a subject or foreign language. Or imagine a hobby like singing or woodworking. You know that one or two lessons isn't enough to make you a master. You must have consistent lessons and practice to master any kind of hobby. If you want a scary thought, think about this. Where you are today is mostly a result of your daily habits.

Habitus is tied in with your daily habits, but there is more to it. It also consists of your constitution and your worldview. Your constitution, in a lot of ways, is given to you at birth. But it is affected by your daily habits. So there's a tie in with your daily habits and constitution. Consider professional athletes. They have a level of God-given talent that most people don't have. They have to have this level to be a professional athlete. But they also have to work really hard. Hard work reveals the natural talent that is there. Your worldview, in a lot of ways, is given to you by your parents and then is honed by your experiences and schooling and learning. Some people are born with more mental capabilities than other people. But again, the natural ability must be honed with daily work.

So what does this mean for a Christian *habitus*?

First, your time is centered around Sunday morning and the Divine Service. This is counter intuitive and took me a long time to learn. It's counter intuitive for two reasons. The first reason is that we're used to thinking about time in smaller terms. Our calendar is broken into days as the regular unit and that's what we're used to thinking of time in. The second reason is because Divine Service is a public event and not a private event. After all, we're stuck in our heads and bodies, aren't we? We're used to thinking individually instead of collectively. But the DS is the center of our time because it gives us the gifts of God and makes us righteous before Him.

Only when we're right with God are we in any kind of shape to deal with the world around us.

This made no sense to me when I wasn't Lutheran. Before I was Lutheran, I understood church as something I did for God. Sadly, this is more and more common among even Lutherans. They think the important thing about church is their praise of God or their emotional connection with God and other people. When I thought like this, it was relatively easy for me to skip church. Sure, I didn't get to check off my "went to church" box as a good work that week, but if it's only something I did for God or for emotional comfort, I can get that other places. When I became Lutheran, I still had this attitude for a little while. But then I learned more and more that God gives good gifts of grace in the Divine Service. When you understand the grace you receive at church, it's never a question of going or not going. You must go. And when you have to miss it because of an emergency, you miss it terribly. Over time, I began to understand that the Divine Service was the center of my week. In fact, it is the most important thing that happens in time and space.

So, our first understanding in a Christian *habitus* is the centrality of the Divine Service. By the way, I rarely call it worship and refer to it as the Divine Service 99% of the time. I would encourage you to do the same because I think it helps teach you that the Divine Service is God serving you good things! You start to embody the Psalm verse: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" (Ps 122:1)

Our second understanding of Christian *habitus* is daily reading of Scripture. And I would highly recommend this be the first part of your day. And I'm not talking about some Goliath sized reading of Scripture. The Treasury of Daily Prayer, which is nothing else than the Daily Lectionary found in your hymnal, gives you about forty verses of Scripture a day plus a Psalm. Another really good way to read through the Bible is to read a chapter a day. If you practice this day in and day out, you'll be amazed over the years how much you retain. It is good to surround this reading of Scripture with a simple liturgy that includes prayer. It can be as simple as reciting "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," the Scripture reading, and praying the Lord's Prayer.

Or it can be as complicated as doing Matins or Morning Prayer every morning. There's no one "right" way to incorporate Scripture into your life. The only wrong thing is not having Scripture as a part of your daily life. However we incorporate the Scriptures into our life daily, we remember that the Scriptures give to us Jesus. A great question before, during, and after your reading is, "What does this show me about Jesus?"

I would also highly recommend incorporating great hymnody into your daily life. And I mean great. Life is too short to waste on learning only good hymnody. The "Hymn of the Days" for each Sunday are a great place to start. That's what I've done with the "Hymn of the Month." I pick one of the "Hymn of the Days" to be the monthly hymn so we get more exposure to it. Another great list is Luther's Catechetical hymns. We'll be starting them as the hymn of the month this Trinity tide. And I'll talk about this at more length another time, but there really is a difference between great, good, and not so good hymnody. And you have to learn what great is. You don't just automatically "hear" it. But this is true of anything great. You have to learn what that is.

Our third and final understanding of Christian *habitus* is service. Christians are meant to serve and not to be served. The service you're to render is determined by your station and place in life. Are you male or female? Are you a husband or wife? Are you a parent or grandparent? Are you employed or retired? Where do you live? You serve other people where God has placed you with the talents and resources God has given you.

As you live out your life of service, you put other people before yourself. This may include times of fasting. It will also include times of almsgiving. It will certainly include time of prayer besides your regular daily prayer.

This third part of *habitus* is the easiest to describe and the hardest to actually do. This Lent we will look at the habits of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Regular practice of these Christian habits will build a strong Christian character that serves as salt and light to the world around him or her. There are many other things we could talk about but that is enough for now. God bless your *habitus*.