Text: 1st Article

**Introduction**

The hymns tonight and the general theme might not seem lent-y. That’s ok. We’ll probably make up for it next week with the 2nd article. But tonight we take the first article. And in the first article and Luther’s explanation there is one doctrine that is emphasized – the doctrine of Providence.

Now you could object and say it is clearly about creation. But there is an important difference between creation and Providence, and it is a difference that Luther’s catechism emphasized.

**Plain Creation**

A lot of people are comfortable with a simple doctrine of creation. Thomas Jefferson was one of them. From the Declaration, “When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them…”. That phrase laws of nature and of nature’s God is the give away. That is sometimes called the God of the Philosophers. Included that category would be things labeled theism or deism.

When you ask the plain question, “Do you believe there is a God?” You still get overwhelming numbers saying yes. There just aren’t that many atheists in the world. Most people aren’t that hardened of heart and soul. They can still look out the window and up at the sky and feel awe. They can still hear reports of DNA or the latest small thing and feel wonder. Great and small we intuit that there is something underneath all of this. Something not of creation, but which it all came from. Nature and Nature’s God. The Unmoved Mover.

And it is not just a religious intuition, even if most people get to theism by awe and wonder. Aquinas’ five ways are logical proofs if you would of the God of the Philosophers. The strongest of them usually held to be the Ontological Argument given classical form by St. Anselm. But which is still refined by academic Philosophers like Alvin Plantinga today. I’m not going to rehearse that tonight. You didn’t show up for a philosophy lecture. I simply point there as the fact that a god of plain creation – a God that we might not be able to know – but one who made us is a shared ground. And Luther covers that go in everything up to the last phrase of the first sentence. “I believe that God has made me…and given me.”

**Providence**

But we might never know that creator. That god of the philosophers could always be as distant as the deist watchmaker who wound it all up and then disappears. After all God owes us nothing. Everything we have he has given us. And it is perfectly reasonable if we complain to say something like “ingrate.”

But Luther changes the doctrine with the last six words. “And still takes care of them.” The God that we confess in the creed, the God who is worshipped and adored, is not just the God of plain creation. He is the God who still takes care of creation. And that care according to Luther is not simply in loaning it existence, but is very specific. “He gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home…He daily and richly provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.”

In His providence we can come to know a this God a bit. We can know his care.

Now we should be careful to step lightly around any prosperity type preaching. If you have a Mercedes and a big house, that does not mean God’s care for you is greater. Luther’s teaching here specific. “He provides me.” And each individual me might daily need a different providence. Luther’s assertion is that the Father provides exactly what we need. And in relation to this life the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. Everything that we need for this body and life is from the Providence of God.

**Pointing Forward**

But this still might not be satisfying. We can know something of God by his providence, but He might still feel distant. His ideas of what this body and life need might be quite different that what I think I need right now. And without further revelation that might be as far as we could see.

Luther’s explanation asserts more. He asserts that not only does God provide for this body and life, but that God “defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from evil…that he does this from divine goodness and mercy.”

Maybe we could make such a leap of faith to good and merciful God. But even if we did, it would be a human Hope open to a lot more doubt than anyone would be comfortable with. I could be wrong by that is something of the endpoint of the Eastern Religions. The many eventually realize they are one. Except for in that the personality – what I need – is extinguished. Luther’s assertion is that God protects me. Without any merit or worthiness, God treats me as a good Father.

To move from that human Hope to a grounded Hope required a further revelation from God. No longer hiding behind nature and the providence of common grace. God came to us. God became incarnate. And in Jesus demonstrated his goodness and mercy to all creation. Revealing the love of the Father for all creation.

**Conclusion**

“And still takes care of them.” God’s providence for his creation – for his creatures – including me – includes the saving grace of his mercy given on the cross. And a Good Father could do nothing less. Jesus came to reveal the Good Father. Amen.