

Lent Wednesday 1 (3/8/2017)
 Luther's Small Catechism
The Ten Commandments
 Exodus 34:1-9

The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean?

We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things.¹

Luther elaborates:

A "god" is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. Conversely, where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God.²

The First Commandment addresses the question of true faith, true allegiance, and so it forms the basis for all the others. *You shall have no other gods.* From the moment the Israelites forged the golden calf, idolatry has remained one of our great shortcomings. Throughout the centuries, we have erected idols of our own, placing our ultimate trust in alternative gods – in philosophies, or institutions, or the free market, or even our own abilities. "Anything on which your heart relies and depends," Luther insists, "that is really your God."

That we have the true God remains in question. That the true God has us, on the other hand, is sure. At the heart of the covenant God establishes with Moses and the Israelites is the promise of God's faithfulness: "The LORD passed before [Moses], and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious,

¹ *Luther's Small Catechism*, 500 Years of Reformation edition, 15.

² Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, 386.

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love....” **Divine commandments are founded on divine trustworthiness, beckoning us into the abundant life God desires for us. The commandments establish the parameters of right relationship – both our relationship with God and with each other – for our sake. Since God’s steadfast love remains at the center of our life together, therefore, “we are to fear, love, and trust God above all things.”**

What does this have to do with Lent?

The Third Commandment: Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

What does this mean?

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God’s word, but instead keep that word holy and gladly hear and learn it.³

Luther elaborates:

[The sabbath], I say, is not restricted... to a particular time so that it must be precisely this day or that, for in itself no one day is better than another. Actually, worship ought to take place daily. ...What is meant by “keeping [the sabbath] holy”? Nothing else than devoting it to holy words, holy works, and holy living.⁴

Dear church, **the holy words of the gospel proclaim nothing less than God’s merciful embrace in spite of our wandering.** Lent is a season to return to this promise with sincerity of heart. So, I invite you to immerse yourself in a forty-day sabbath, coming together whenever you have the chance to hear the word of God and to pray, and recommitting yourself to the holy works and holy living that emerge from faith renewed.

³ *Luther’s Small Catechism*, 500 Years of Reformation edition, 17.

⁴ Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, 398.