

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who perfectly fulfilled the Law, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

I'm going to start out today with a question for all of you. What is Church? If you ask 10 Christians that question you're likely to get one of several answers. Some might say Church is the gathered people of God. Others would say it's where Christians go to get equipped for the mission of spreading God's love and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Still others and I believe this is the vast majority, would tell you Church is the place where they come to get their batteries recharged or their spiritual gas tank filled up after a long six days doing battle with sin, death, and the devil. At some point I've felt the Church to be all of these things. Over the years I've learned that the Church is so much more than just my personal spiritual gas station. If that's what Church means to you, I'm not judging you, but I am asking you to step out of your tiny self-centered perspective and let's all try to see the Church through the eyes of the one who created it and everything else in the universe as well...

So, let's think for a few minutes about what the church is meant to be according to God's perspective? I know this may be a difficult task for us. We do live in a world of selfies and increasingly of 3 minute videos we post on Tic-Tok... It's a world where more and more, everyone feels it's necessary to tweet or post our every feeling and opinion as if our opinion actually matters to anyone except

ourselves. Instead of scrolling through Facebook pages and Tic-Tok videos maybe if we go back to the source of all things we might be able to see from God's perspective. In the portion of the Ten Commandments we have before us today God has given us what Bible Scholars call the First Table of the Commandments. These first three Commands deal with our relationship with this jealous creator God. You will not have any other gods. You will not misuse the name of God. You will remember the Sabbath and keep it Holy. If only we could just obey these three tiny Commands all the rest would fall in line. Unfortunately, we are unable or unwilling to follow these and as a result our world lives in sin and constant tumult.

Every time I teach my Confirmation students about the Ten Commandments I tell them these are words of promise from a loving God. So many well-meaning Christians and God Followers have misread these words of God for thousands of years. We have turned what God meant as a blessing into an onerous burden no one can carry. It's all about perspective. Here's what I mean. Imagine a High School student who is having trouble with math. Not much of a stretch... Now there's a big test coming up and the student believes he's going to fail. His mother spends several evenings helping him with the homework and learning the theorems and steps for solving the problems. On the morning of the big test she tells her son

how much she loves him and then says, “You will pass this test and you will do well.”

Now imagine another scenario. That same student having the same math troubles is on the basketball team. His coach just learned his star player is in danger of being benched due to his low math grades. The coach gets right up in the face of the young man and screams, “You WILL PASS that test... or else!” See the difference? It’s all in the perspective of how you hear the words.

As we learn from Jesus when he taught the disciples to pray, we’re to ask God that His Holy Will might be done right here on Earth, just as it is in Heaven. Seen from this perspective, these first three Commandments might be a promise that someday we will have no other gods before us. Someday we will only use God’s name in prayer, praise and petition. Someday, we will all rest in God’s loving arms and be totally at peace with God and with the world. Words of promise versus words of command and coercion. I prefer to see them as promise...

Let’s get back to our first question... What is Church from God’s perspective? Our Heavenly Father chose for Himself a unique and peculiar people to be His people, His chosen ones – The Hebrews – Israel. God would use this one nation as a living illustration for all the other nations of the world. As God told

Abraham, “I will bless you to be a blessing to the nations...” In the same way, Jesus chose for Himself a unique and peculiar people from all the nations of the world to become the Church “Ecclesia” the Called Out Ones”. The Love of Christ has “Called us Out” of the World of Sin to His Holiness in order to be His Church. God is a jealous God. He does not want our attention, devotion, service, love or worship directed at any other thing or god. Martin Luther famously said anything that comes between you and God is your idol or your god... The Hebrews understood this early after they had made a golden calf while waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments. Many lost their lives that day because of the sin of Idolatry. So, first and foremost, our church is about worshiping the Living God and not about the things in the building or the building itself. It’s about God not about us. It’s about recognizing God as Supreme, Holy, all Powerful and the source of our Salvation. That is the attitude we are to bring into this sanctuary on Sunday morning. When we worship God in purity and in truth we might receive some of these other “benefits,” but that’s not why we’re here nor is it why the Church exists. It’s not about what I or you get out of it that matters. It’s about demonstrating to God and making a public witness to the rest of the world that we have no other gods and Church is the place where we gather to show that to the world.

Please don't misunderstand me on what Church is. It's not a bad thing to get your spiritual battery recharged, your spiritual gas tank refilled, or to be equipped for ministry, but all those things can be done outside of worship. On Sunday morning we gather together as God's people around God's Holy Word and the Sacraments in order to give God our thanks and our praise. We give to God the Honor and the Glory only God deserves for creating us and all things, for sustaining us each and every day we are privileged to get up and walk the face of this great planet God has created and given to us to care for. We gather to receive His Body and His Blood as God's greatest gift to us--the gift that gives us eternal life and forgiveness for all those times when we were unable or unwilling to live out the blessings God gave us in these ten promises.

I pray we will learn to see these ten words of God as the blessings they were meant to be. May we live our lives embodying these blessings and publicly proclaiming our love for this awesome God who created us, who redeemed us from sin, death, and the devil through His only Son, Jesus Christ, and who sustains us and makes us pure and holy through the gift of His Holy Spirit.

Trinity Lutheran Church, I know of your great love for God. There will be a day when you won't have any other gods getting in your way of showing and sharing that love. Trinity Lutheran Church, I've seen how much you love to call on the name of God both in times of trouble and times of plenty. There will be a

day when your great love will only call on the Lord your God rightly and in pure worship. Trinity Lutheran Church, the ritual God established from the very beginning by taking one day of the week for rest will provide time and space for your worship and praise, but also to rest your weary bodies and souls for another time when the work of God's Kingdom calls you back into the labor field. Hear these words, not as commands to obey begrudgingly, but as words of promise and blessing from your God who loves you, who gathers you to bless you, and then who sends you into the world with His grace to spread His Gospel. Amen.