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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
The 10 Commandments

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Our Lenten journey begins today.

It's a journey to the other side of the cross,
to the empty tomb,
to our resurrected Lord,
to unrestrained joy.

And yet it's a journey—
a journey that begins with ashes:
“Remember, O Man, that you are dust—and to dust you shall return.”

Nothing reminds us so well of our weakness, our limits, our imperfections, and our *dustiness*,
as the Law of God.

When that word of Law strikes us, it kills us.
It takes no hostages,
it leaves no room for bargaining or excuses—
When the Lord calls a sin a sin and you're the sinner,
He's got you.
You're dust.
And to dust, you shall return.

Now you all know what this Law is.
It's been written on your hearts, instilled on your conscience,
it's knowing what's right and what's wrong.

But if you've forgotten, or need a reminder, you can always find it in the 10 Commandments:

- 1. You shall have no other Gods.**
- 2. You shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God.**
- 3. Remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy.**
- 4. Honor your father and your mother.**
- 5. You shall not murder.**
- 6. You shall not commit adultery.**
- 7. You shall not steal.**
- 8. You shall not give false testimony.**
- 9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.**
- 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.**

These 10 Commandments are perhaps the most famous writing in all of history.

And while almost everyone has heard of them,
 few are able to confess what they are,
 even fewer can explain what they mean,
 and none can keep them.

But these 10 Commandments, if kept, promise “grace and every blessing.”

So why don't you do them?
 Why don't you quit messing around and actually *do* the 10 Commandments?
 Why don't you love the Lord your God alone?
 Why do you put your neighbor down and hurt his reputation?
 Why do you lust after other women and visit such disgusting websites?
 Why don't you keep the 10 Commandments?

Well, it's because “*you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*”

These 10 Commandments certainly point out our sin.
 They show our having other gods on a daily basis in what we say and do.
 They burden our conscience and make us almost sick to our stomach.

And that's why we ignore them.

We ignore the 10 Commandments as best we can because if we get too close, we might get hurt.

We don't mind confessing in general that we're sinful—
 we just don't want the details of *how!*

The 10 Commandments point out exactly *how* we sin.
 They expose our fear of losing control,
 our love of ourselves,
 and our trust in what we do.

The 10 Commandments don't let us be a sinner in general, but a very specific and guilty sinner.

And so it is that the 10 Commandments are the very best summary of the Law for us.

They cover everything:

How we fail to fear, love, and trust in God above all things,
 and how we fail to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And this is the chief purpose of the Law—

to stop our excuses,
 our blaming others,
 and to cut right to the chase:
 we're guilty.

The 10 Commandments leave us feeling this way because we don't keep them.

But is that the way the Lord gave these 10 Words?

Is He just a big rule-making downer, who doesn't want us to have any fun?
Or worse, is this God of the Law, the Old Testament God, somehow inferior to Jesus?

No. No to all of these.

The Lord didn't give these 10 *Words* to make us miserable.

He doesn't like taking our fun away.

The God that gave these 10 *Words* to Moses and all of Israel,
is no different than the God who took the flesh born of Mary as His own.

These 10 *Words* aren't simply Law:
they're not only accusations, do's and don'ts, and party spoilers.

The 10 *Words* are in fact, *gifts* from the Lord.

Just listen to the setting in which they're given:

"I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2).

Before the 10 *Words* even begin, we hear the confession of who this Lord is that gives the 10 *Words*.

Now, I say "10 *Words*" because nowhere in Scripture does it *ever* say 10 Commandments!
It's *always* the 10 *Words* (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4).

And each of these 10 *Words* comes from the Lord who delivers His people from sin's bondage.

These 10 *Words* are given to *us*—

those that are delivered, those who are free—

as a gift.

That's right, these *Words* aren't just rules we can't keep, or self-help tips.

They're *gifts*, protecting us from receiving the gifts of the Lord wrongly.

And so, "do not commit adultery" is a protective *gift*—

it protects the gift of a spouse, of companionship and intimate love.

Do not steal is also a gift—

protecting the things that our Lord freely gives us, even without our asking.

Do not take the Lord's name in vain, is a gift—

it protects us from thinking the Lord's name is just like any other name;

and it invites us to call upon it in every trouble.

Each of these 10 *Words* guards against the sin of using the Lord's gifts wrongly.

And most important of all the 10 *Words* is the first.

"You shall have no other gods."

"What does it mean to have a god?" you ask—

It means "that from which we're to expect all good and in which we're to take refuge in all distress...nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart" (LC, 488).

The Word that says we're to have no other gods,
protects the gift of God Himself *for us*.

It protects us from despising our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.
It protects us from the false thinking that we can take care of ourselves.
It protects us from fearing, trusting, and loving something that has no care for us—
even ourselves.

“God Himself is the ultimate gift.
We don't create our gods; God creates us.
We don't choose God; God chooses us.”¹
We don't make the journey to God; but God journeys to us.
And that's what sets this Lord apart from all other lords.

Our God comes to us.
He picks up ashes from the ground and breathes into them His life-giving Spirit.

And when the living ashes eat of the fruit and fall from paradise and joy and life—
returning to the dust from which they came—
it's still this same Lord who washes away their dustiness.

The 10 Commandments that kill your old, dusty, sinful self—marked by ashes,
are the same 10 Words that simply describe what Christ is like for you and in you.

They're 10 Words that protect you from having God any other way than the way He wants to
give Himself to you.

They're 10 Words that describe your new life in Christ,
a life of receiving God Himself—
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—
and even all the gifts that come with Him:
Forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

¹ Rev. Bill Cwirla, “Ten Commandments...Ten Gifts,” *Higher Things* (Summer 2008), 21.