

Good morning everyone, my name is Calvin and I'm the Confirmation Director here at Servant of Christ. As I mentioned in the announcements both pastors are gone today, so I get the pleasure of giving the sermon today. For those of you who have kids or work in District 11 I know that this is your spring break, so thanks for being here. For the rest of you, we're on the cusp of spring and when the weather gets nicer people like to try out different things that are, well, not-church-related. So thanks for being here.

I've already seen on Facebook some of the exotic places that people are going. And you know, I'm fine if they go to these places...I just get upset when they don't take me along with them. I don't think that's so unreasonable. Instead I get to sit at home, scrolling through Facebook and trying to live vicariously through other people's vacations. The secret to really feeling like I'm there, turn the space heater on extra high and wear a Hawaiian shirt. I'm telling you, it works.

Speaking of Facebook, I had a couple of friends in college. They were a couple years older than me, and we were all working at a church camp. These two, Greg and Lindsey, had been dating for a while and they were one of those couples everyone loved and rooted for. They had this conversation while working at the camp that they didn't need a Facebook relationship to govern their feelings for each other, so they deleted their relationship status on Facebook. Within hours they realized their mistake as dozens of messages and posts came in with other people's condolences for their breakup. Of course, Greg and Lindsey hadn't broken up, they were very much still together. In fact, today they're married and have two sons, and Greg is a Youth Pastor up in Andover.

As silly as Facebook is, there is something to be said about the impact it's had on our society. When I was single I thought that I was above a relationship status, much like Greg and Lindsey...I never used it. Not until I was married. And now I have it up on Facebook, because I want everyone to know that my wife is taken.

Let's watch a quick video of just how important relationships statuses can be.

(<https://youtu.be/RYhZsPBnTKk>)

Pretty funny stuff! Now, you may or may not know this, but if you claim that you're in a relationship with someone, they have to press the "OK" button; so it was extra important for him to have his wife's phone there with him. This morning we're going to be talking about the first three commandments in the Small Catechism. I can't help but think that the first three commandments were God's way of putting up a relationship status with us. Of course there was no Facebook back then, so the best thing God could think of was to show up on a mountain top and etch it into stone...even more permanent than ink.

Think about it, God puts out an offer to everyone. First, don't have any other Gods. God is monogamous – God wants it to be just you and God. Second, don't take God's name in vain. In the Small Catechism Martin Luther explains it like this, "We are to fear and love God so that we do not use his name superstitiously, or use it to curse, swear, lie, or deceive, but to call on God in prayer, praise and thanksgiving." In other words, don't use God's name or reputation for your personal gain, but talk to God in prayer, praise God for all the good things, and thank God for what God has done. Seems to me like good relationship advice.

Third, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." This is God's *quality time* commandment. Luther explains it in this way, which I think elevates it from just a day of rest:

“We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect his Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.” I think that this is God’s “it takes a village” commandment. Show up with the community of believers, hear the word preached, learn from it, talk about it, and teach it to each other and others.

In essence God has just sent a relationship status request to us, and it’s up to us to accept it or reject it.

And what happens if we do accept it? I’ll tell you what happens in my life when have no other gods / in other words when I put nothing ahead of God. I get peace. God promises us the peace that passes all human understanding...Tiger McLuen, a youth ministry giant, put it this way: “God promises us the peace that doesn’t make any sense.” **When everything seems to be crashing down, or when the walls seem to be closing in, when things are out of our control...God makes that first commandment COME ALIVE – and suddenly it’s just us and God.**

The second commandment tells us to treat the name of God as holy, and to call on God in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Science tells us that human brains are oriented towards responding to the stress of daily living with fear or anger. But science also says that if we focus on God it can reorient the way we respond to compassion, empathy and focus. Prayer is a form of meditation that lets us focus on God, and when done for 30 minutes every day it has incredible effects on our body and mind. The mayo clinic published an article in October of last year with some benefits of meditation and prayer. According to mayo, research suggests that meditation may help people manage symptoms of conditions such as:

- Anxiety

- Asthma
- Cancer
- Chronic pain
- Depression
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Sleep problems
- Tension headaches

Science shows us how our bodies and minds are literally being transformed when we view God's name as holy and call on God in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Let's change our vocabulary so that when we say God's name we are using it as something set apart, and something that can literally transform us.

I can tell you firsthand how prayerful meditation helped me in my life. I've shared before about my mental health, and how I struggled with depression as a youth and even into adulthood. But sitting down and meditating on God's love helped to lift me out of the pits of despair and to find love, peace and encouragement in God's love.

Not only do we get peace from God, not only does God start to transform us individually, but God transforms us communally as well. The third commandment about keeping the Sabbath Day holy, the one Martin Luther said isn't just about rest but is also about getting to a church community and letting the Word of God be preached so that we can love it and learn from it. Again, science is in favor of going to church. Society says, "You don't need church. You can get

community in other places. Besides, they're all a bunch of hypocrites." Science, on the other hand, says that going to church regularly gives us a sense of belonging, and gives a significant chance of adding 2-3 more years to our lives.

As Lutherans we also believe that the spoken and preached Word of God is God's voice coming alive and entering into our lives. Showing up to church regularly not only gives us a sense of community and belonging, but it also lets us *HEAR* and *EXPERIENCE* God's voice.

If this was as simple as clicking "I accept" on the relationship request God sent me, I'd be running to me office and clicking yes right now. A relationship that has physical, mental and spiritual benefits? That's a relationship that I want to be in!

But how do we know if we are putting God first? How do we know if we're not just clicking the metaphorical button, but never acting on that relationship? I'd challenge you to do a few things. First, TODAY, go home and open your calendar and look at what is on it. Write them down on a sheet of paper and ask yourself if your calendar is reflecting a lifestyle that puts Jesus first. This can be a painful process, but I'm sure you'll find success stories in it, too. Knowing where our priorities are is the first step in reorganizing them; so after you know, start to reorganize them. Take it one step at a time.

Next, open up your checkbook – and do it right after your calendar. You've already got the ball rolling, why stop now? Repeat the process you did with your calendar. Where are your priorities? Having godly priorities in our checkbook is more than just tithes and offerings to the church. Don't get me wrong, tithes and offerings are an extremely important part, but so is managing our money. Our debt to income ratio, savings accounts, investment in our future, giving to charities, and a balanced life are also very important. Again, this can be a painful

process, but it can also be a really exciting process. Take advantage of Financial Peace University that we offer here every January, or take advantage of Thrivent's financial coaching services. Start implementing a plan to put God first in your finances. I can tell you first-hand how life changing FPU was for me and my finances.

Lastly, go to the people you consider to be your faith-role-models and ask them what they do to put God first. Ask them when and how they pray. Ask them for encouragement and wisdom in your life, and then learn from them.

Let's imagine for a moment what the church would look like if we accepted God's relationship status – If we took things from “it's complicated” with God to “in a relationship with God.” We would a community of welcoming people who were physically, mentally and spiritually healthy. A generous community who gave to those who were in need, who could support one another when they were in need. It's not that we don't already do these things; in fact we ARE doing these things...but we'd be even better at them! With God's help and keeping our eyes on God, we could accomplish amazing things in this church, in Champlin, in Minnesota, and throughout the world!

Lastly, remember that as Lutherans we believe in Law AND Gospel. God gave us this law as a way of establishing a relationship with God. The next 7 commandments that we'll talk about next week is God's way of giving us instruction for how to relate to each other, too. But we know that the law keeps accusing, and that we'll never be “good enough” for the law. We'll never achieve enough. We'll never be saved by the law. And when we do mess up and the law wants to tell us that we failed and that we aren't saved, Gospel and Grace step in and say that in

God's eyes we are saved by grace through faith. Gospel and Grace step in and save us from the law, and never tire of giving us a second chance.

This afternoon when you look at your calendars and checkbooks, you may feel down on yourself in the areas where you need to improve. But God sees those areas through the lens of the gospel, and God is so excited for you to give it another shot. God is excited to come alongside you and start fresh. God doesn't see you as a failure, but instead God loves the opportunity to meet you where you are, and to come alongside you in your faith journey.

So take another chance. Let's reorganize our lives to put these three commandments first, to put God first, and the say YES to being in a relationship with God.