In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My friends, I want this to be a happy Lutheran sermon about the Ten Commandments. I want to be a Lutheran preacher standing before you and rejoicing in the holy law of God. I want to be like King David in today’s Psalm who praises the law of the Lord with happy words:

7The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul; [It is good to have a revived soul]...
9... the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold, sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb. (Psalm 19:7-10, LBW)

The key idea to keep in mind if we want to speak of the Ten Commandments in a happy way is that for Jesus, the Commandments of God are connected with love. And we all favor love! For a boy like me growing up in the sixties, Jackie DeShannon’s song (1965) will forever ring true:

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of

Amen to that. Isn’t that the truth! Love is the only thing that there’s just too little of. Well, the theme of this sermon is that if we really want to take care of people in this world, we will obey the Ten Commandments. If we would be people of love, we would be people of God’s holy law. If we would say Yes to the existence of other people — even to the rude person on the sidewalk or the one who is letting us down and breaking our hearts — if we would love people, not in some vague emotional way, but in the concrete way of taking care of them, then we will practice the Ten Commandments. Those Commandments will mean a lot to us. They will be a big deal in our life.

Again, many of us believe that love is the chief thing in a Christian life. And that is good. But I want to move beyond this to another idea: That love is to be found in the Ten Commandments... that love gets its content from the will of our Maker for us... that if we would really take care of one another, we had best work even harder at obeying the holy law of God. And so, when Moses comes down from Mt. Sinai holding the Ten Commandments in his arms, he is
actually holding the path of love for us in his arms, in those two tables of the law.

The sermon I have set for myself now is probably too BIG for me to accomplish in one sermon. In fact, I suspect it would take ten sermons to come close to it. But even in brief outline, maybe I can make my point. Here is my overall theme: Our Lord Jesus — this world’s great person of love — Jesus believes in each of the Ten Commandments we find in this morning’s First Lesson. He believes them with his whole heart, he practiced them, and he loved us in doing so. So that is what I mean now to do: To zoom through each of the Ten Commandments and to illustrate or at least suggest that Jesus believes in the Commandments one by one. This sermon could expand into a whole midweek Lent series. And maybe I will do that someday. For now, let me try my hand at persuading us that the greatest person of love our world has ever known is Someone who believed and taught the Commandments of God. Of course he believed them! They are his Commandments!

So, here goes. I am going to number the Commandments as Luther taught us. The First Commandment, as Luther counts them, goes this way:

You are to have no other gods.

That Jesus believed in this First Commandment is easy enough to demonstrate. Think only of the wilderness temptations. Satan must have gone mad. He actually tempted Jesus with idolatry:

8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; 9and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” (Matthew 4:8, RSV)

Well, the devil soon got his comeuppance for that!

10Then Jesus said to him, “Begone, Satan! for it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”’

So, it is easy enough to demonstrate that Jesus believed in the First Commandment. The new thing I am suggesting is that it was love that drove Jesus to it. He loved everyone too much to give his heart anyway to any other god. For if we do that... if we put our trust in any other thing or theory, if we find our ultimate values and the very meaning of life in anything other than our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then we might well fail in love in the critical moment. For sure, if Jesus had fallen down and worship Satan, he
would have failed in his love for us, for Satan does not love us. So, love compelled Jesus to obey the First Commandment.

The Second Commandment:

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

I have two rules for my Catechism students: No gum chewing and no cussing. In particular, I do not want them to take the name of the Lord in vain. I do not want them to say, for example, “O my god!” I know that lots of people do it, but I hope we will stop that speech habit. The name of our God should be spoken with reverence, in prayer and in preaching that is true to our God.

The classic temptation in the Bible about taking the Lord’s name in vain is false prophecy. The big problem with the prophet saying, “Thus says the Lord,” when the Lord has not said whatever the prophet wants to say, is that it breaks the Second Commandment and puts the people at risk. Jesus calls people on this in the New Testament. He was hard on the Pharisees and scribes, for example, because they were putting words in the mouth of God:

7 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. 8 You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. (Mark 7:7-8, RSV)

This is a dangerous thing to do. Pastors and parents and Sunday School teachers and Christians in general talking to someone else, let us please not prop up our teaching with the name of God unless we are honestly reporting the will of God. Otherwise, we are putting people at risk and failing to love them.

Third,

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Let us not underestimate this commandment against Sabbath-breaking. Coming to church each Sunday is our great chance to draw near to our God, to hear and to pray to him. This will help keep us on track. This will help lead us into love, because love is the chief thing we learn in church about God and about how to treat our neighbor.

And so, sure enough, Jesus honored the Sabbath day. Right there in the First Chapter of Mark, right after Jesus has called his disciples, he goes to church:
And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. (Mark 1:21, KJV)

Jesus still teaches in church. So, let us be increasingly faithful in coming to church, so that Jesus can teach us the ways of love. You are here, and so you are doing well. Let us continue to do well.

Fourth,

Honor your father and your mother.

Interestingly, Luther puts this commandment at the top of the list of those commandments that concern our neighbor — even before the commandment against murder. He reasons that if we parents will be honorable as our God judges things, and if the children will honor us, then all will go well. We will naturally observe the other commandments because the first duty of parents is to teach the ways of God to their children. Luther stresses that we should all honor our parents even if those parents are lowly. His magnificent words go this way:

Young people must therefore be taught to revere their parents as God’s representatives, and to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric they may be, they are their own father and mother, given them by God. (Large Catechism, The Fourth Commandment, Tappert)

Jesus did this. Compared to Jesus, even to the teenage Jesus, Mary and Joseph were probably pretty lowly. And yet, Jesus was obedient to them:

Then [the twelve-year-old Jesus] went down with [Mary and Joseph] and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:51, NRSV)

The Fifth Commandment:

You shall not kill.

The connection between love and the Commandment against murder is pretty easy to understand. If we would love people, let us not murder them, no matter how frustrated or outraged or burdened we might be. This includes children in the womb. The church understands them to be under the protection of the Fifth Commandment. Luther points out that the positive
meaning of this commandment is that we are to “help and befriend” our neighbor in every necessity of life. For Luther, it is not good enough that we refrain from murdering people. The Fifth Commandment also asks us to help them. Indeed, the Fifth Commandments asks us to love them.

And so we come to that great saying in John about Jesus:

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. (John 13:1, KJV)

You are among Jesus’s own, and he loves us “to the end.” He chooses to die that we might live. He does not murder us, but dies for us.

The Sixth Commandment:

You shall not commit adultery.

There are various ways of hurting people in this world. We can murder them, rob them, ruin their reputations. But also we can do this: We can break their hearts. Do not commit adultery. Do not break the heart of your neighbor. Love requires that we honor the vows of holy marriage.

Certainly one of the most lovely stories about Jesus is his forgiveness of the woman caught in adultery. But my aim in this sermon is to point out that Jesus believes in the commandments, one by one. Love requires him to do so. And so we have his important concluding exhortation to the woman. Her accusers have dropped their stones and faded away. The story ends this way:

10When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? 11She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:10-11, KJV)

It is that last part I am lifting up: Go, and sin no more. With these words, Jesus commits himself to the Sixth Commandment. He does not want us to be breaking each other’s heart.

The Seventh Commandment:

You shall not steal.

For Luther this means that we should not even be lazy on our jobs, for if we are, then we are receiving our wages, but not in a fair and square way.
Satan would rob us of every good thing. If he could he would destroy every crop in the field and every loaf in the breadbasket. But Jesus does the reverse. He would rather be poor than that you and I should be poor. And so we have the great testimony of St. Paul concerning Jesus:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9, RSV)

The Eighth Commandment:

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

This is the Commandment that asks us to love our neighbor by protecting our neighbor's reputation. As Luther puts it, we “should apologize for [our neighbor], speak well of him, and interpret charitably all that he does.”

Breaking this commandment seems to have really bothered Jesus. He believed that his opponents bore false witness against him. They even accused him of doing wonders by way of the devil:

But when the Pharisees heard it they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” (Matthew 12:24, RSV)

Jesus gave answer to this. He denied that he did his miracles by way of the devil. So, he denied the charge of his opponents, but he did not revile them. And so we read of Jesus:

22He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips.
23When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:22-23, RSV)

Jesus might well have been exasperated by his opponents, but his love even for them was such that he did not break the Eighth Commandment against them.

The Ninth and the Tenth Commandments concern coveting. When these two commandments are simply stated, there is a rhyme to them:

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house nor spouse.
That is, we should get the desires of our hearts under control concerning both our neighbor's property \textit{and} people. We should not desire the things and people of our neighbor in an extraordinary way, nor should we permit ourselves to desire what we should not have, like our neighbor's spouse. We are not talking about behavior here, but rather about our desires. The Ninth and Ten Commandments ask us to seek purity of heart. I think these two commandments are especially important in our modern world — a world so very skillful at placing desires in our hearts, so that we are left feeling restless unless we have the latest fashion and so on.

For these commandments, I think we can return to the story of the wilderness temptations of Jesus. Satan tempts Jesus with everything the heart can desire: with food, with fame, even with all this world's kingdoms and the glory thereof (Luke 4:5-6). But Jesus has so trained his heart, that these temptations roll right off his back. He simply sends Satan packing.

In all of these commandments, love was at stake. Jesus could not love this world as he did if he had broken or compromised the commandments.

And so, if any one should come along and say that it is okay to forget about one of the commandments, even if that one should be an angel from heaven, then let us answer with words like this: “Outta my way! I have something important to do! I have to love the world by obeying the holy Commandments of our God” — the commandments of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to whom belongs the glory now and forever. Amen.