

A mosaic-style illustration of Moses, with a long white beard and hair, wearing a white robe with gold armlets. He is holding up two large, dark, rectangular tablets with Hebrew text. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky with golden and blue tones. The text on the tablets is in Hebrew, including "לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים" (You shall have no other gods).

"THE FIRST COMMANDMENT:

*You shall have no
other gods."*

Reflection by Rev'd Joseph Nelson



During the main parts of the year we have a catechism lesson as part of the service at St Luke's. This is so that we can get to know our faith better together as a congregation. We are starting again from the beginning and I hope to put many of the lessons on here. What does it mean to have a god?

Luther says in the Large Catechism: "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."

So, the First Commandment is not simply about believing in the existence God. It is asking a much deeper question: What or who do we actually trust?

We can say that we believe in God. We can come to church. We can say the Creed. But what do we look to when things go wrong? Where do we turn when we are afraid? What do we think will finally make us secure?

That is our god.

Luther says that whatever we make our highest good, whatever we trust above all else, becomes our god. And this means that idols are not simply statues. An idol can be money. It can be our reputation. It can be our career. It can be another person. It can even be ourselves.

Anything can become an idol when we begin to say, consciously or unconsciously: "If I have this, then I will be alright."

So Luther connects all the commandments, but the First Commandment in particular, with fear, love and trust.

We are to fear God above everything else. That does not mean being terrified of God. It means recognising that God is God, and that there is nothing and nobody greater than him. That he has power over all things and can rule guide and govern us. That we are totally dependent on him and his mercy towards us.

We are to love God above everything else. Not because he needs our love, but because he has given everything to and for us. What are we clinging to? What do we hold onto that is not God? What is more important – that thing or person or God? If there is something you are not willing to let go of for God – that thing becomes your God – that is the thing you fear love and trust above all things – and this is idolatry.

And we are to trust God above everything else. This is perhaps the hardest part. When everything else is uncertain, can we still say: God is enough?

Questions for us to think about:

- What do I turn to when I am afraid?
- What would I find hardest to lose?
- What do I secretly think I need in order to be alright?
- Is my trust really in God, or only in God when everything else is going well?

And notice what the commandment does not say. It does not say, "You must make yourself trust God enough." Rather, it exposes the things we have trusted instead of God.

And this is where we see the Gospel (good news) because we are to look to Jesus.

The God whom Luther teaches us to fear, love, and trust is not distant from us. He has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. The God who commands us to trust him is the God who gives himself for us.

So the First Commandment is not simply a demand. It is also an invitation: stop looking for your life somewhere else. Look to God. Trust him. He is your God. And in Christ, he has forgiven you and gives himself to you in Word and Sacrament.

