

Sermon followed by Service - March 9, 2025 - First
Commandment

You need heart surgery. Do you want a first-year medical student performing the operation, or a seasoned doctor who has done the surgery two-thousand times? You're accused of a serious crime you didn't commit. Are you content with an intern googling how to defend you, or do you want a skilled, experienced attorney with a track record of winning verdicts? You need help, serious help. Do you want a self-important wannabee spouting off commands and promises ... do you want a pretender pretending to help, pretending to care, while he's really just looking out for himself? Or do you want someone who will actually look out for you? You want the one who will best take care of you, don't you?

Apply that reality to the First Commandment. When God commands: **“You shall have no other gods before me ...”** When God declares: **“There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me ...”** When God says: **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding ...”** What does our sinful nature think? “He's just looking out for himself.” And then our Self pretends to know better than anybody else - “I'm not trusting anybody who doesn't make sense to me.” “I'm not listening to anybody who doesn't think the way I think.” “I'm not answering to no one but me.” As if we know better than God. As if we can do better than God. As if we deserve more attention than God. As if we would be better off with our Self as God.

Do you know anybody who thinks that way? I know a few ... starting with Me, Myself, and I.

Where do you see other people thinking they're better, smarter, wiser than God?

Where do you catch yourself thinking you're better, smarter, wiser than God?

The truth is God doesn't need my attention; he doesn't need my love; he doesn't need me. But he does love me and he does love you. And he knows there is no one who loves us as much as he does, no one who loves us as right as he does, no one who can do for us as much as or as well as he does, no one who cares for us as much as he cares.

At the same time, God also knows there are an awful lot of imposters out there - pretenders, fakes, and frauds claiming they have better for us than what God has for us, claiming they are better for us than God is. God knows the noise and the voices we hear in our hearts and minds, the voices and the noise looking to distract us from what is godly and good for us, the noise and the voices looking to distract us from who is good for us. And God knows what happens to us when we listen to the noise and the voices of the imposters and pretenders - we dig ourselves deeper into a bottomless pit of trouble - and worse - we leave the blessing God has for his children and we take hold of the judgment God has for his enemies.

So God says - no, God doesn't just say, he commands. Like my brother-in-law, the retired fireman, at the fire scene. When the looky-loos were getting too close to the live power lines, he didn't just say and suggest: "You might want to step back," but he commanded: "Get back," so God doesn't just suggest, "you might want to stick close with me; you might want to stay away from those fakes and frauds," no - God doesn't just say and suggest, but he commands: "**You shall have no other gods before me.**" Not because he is looking out for his self-interest, but because he is looking out for our interests. With this first commandment, and all his commandments, God isn't just suggesting and he isn't just commanding us, he is protecting us, protecting us from self-destruction, protecting us from eternal damnation.

How do we know God's commands aren't just the commands of a power-tripping pretender?

So, "**you shall have no other gods.**" Some might think, "Oh, that's easy. We don't have any Baals or Molechs, no Zeus or Apollo, no Buddha, no idol shrine." If that were all that were to it, that might be easy, for us. But God isn't just talking about made-up idol-gods. Luther explains: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things."

- What's more important to me? Listening to God by getting together at church and getting out my Bible at home? Or getting all busy with the world and thinking that the world's distractions and my excuses are better than listening to God? _____
- What's more important to me? Giving my first and my best to God for his kingdom or keeping my first and my best for my kingdom? _____
- What's more important to me? God-time or game-time? _____
- What's more important to me? Being true to my feelings or being true to God's Word? Doing what makes sense to me or doing what might make sense only to God? _____

Luther said: "a god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need." So where do we look and look most for our good? Where do we look first and look most when we're in trouble? That's our god. So, no, "**You shall have no other gods**" is not an easy commandment; "**You shall have no other gods**" is the first and most impossible commandment.

For us. But not for Jesus. Think back to Christmas. As the Son of God, Jesus lived in the comfort of heaven; he had the glory of heaven; and he gave it up to do what God had for him to do. Think ahead to Holy Thursday. As the horrible reality of the cross is getting closer and closer, as the horrible reality of God's curse is twisting and crushing sharper and heavier on Jesus' heart; Jesus didn't pull back from what God gave him to do; instead he stepped up and stepped forward: "**Not my will, but your will be done.**" Then on Good Friday, when everything he

felt and everything he saw screamed: “God is against you,” Jesus trusted his Father’s promise, he trusted himself in his Father hands: “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**” And on Easter, what do we see? Jesus’ fear, love, and trust in God were not disappointed. God raised Jesus back to life and seated him at his right hand in heaven.

Did you notice? Jesus’ obedience to God was love for you, and not just a love feeling. Jesus’ First Commandment obedience to God was a whole-hearted, whole-life, whole-being sacrifice of himself for you and for me - from Christmas to the cross. What does that mean for you? Baptized into Jesus, you are covered with Jesus, covered with Jesus’ First-Commandment obedience and life ... so God sees you right by him, as right as he sees Jesus. At the Supper with Jesus, because Jesus sacrificed himself to God for you, you have God’s new covenant forgiveness - “You are forgiven!” In the Word with Jesus, you have God’s love, God’s promise, God’s future for you in heaven.

Take a moment to think about this: What does that mean for you?

So what do we do? We treasure the First Commandment - isn’t it amazing?! The all-powerful, all-creating, heaven-blessing God loves us so much he wants to be our first love, our first call, our first trust. He wants us to live like he has everything we need, not because he needs us, but because he has everything we need. That’s why we don’t pull back from the First Commandment - God has better for us than any fake or fraud god out there; God has better for us than any pretend god in here (our

heart). So what do we do? We test and we train our hearts by the First Commandment - Who's first in my heart? Who's my first call in times of trouble? Who's my first joy when times are good? Who's my first priority? We test our hearts by the First Commandment, and then we train our hearts by the First Commandment. How? We live a life of Ash Wednesday and Lent - we confess and repent; day after day, we confess and repent. And then what? We live Easter - we live forgiven and alive with God. How? We let our hearts and minds go free - "We love because he first loved us." And we trust because "all God's promises are 'yes' in Christ!" Amen.

How is this true? When we think of the First Commandment with our hearts and minds full of Jesus, instead of thinking "have-to" obedience to God's First "Command and Demand and Expectation," the thought of "command and demand and expectation" go away, and we more and more freely and joyfully live "we get to fear and love and trust in God above all things!" Thank you, Lord!

March 8 & 9, 2025

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are surrounded by false gods. Some look like pagan or demonic idols; some look good like the benefits of the good life; some look like our imagined selves. All of them would leave us in the lurch, and worse.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we are reminded that there is a God who has better for us than any of our false gods, and in love for us, he tells us so! Today we review the 1st Commandment.

OPENING HYMN

"Speak, O Savior, I Am Listening"
Hymn 631

Speak, O Savior, I am list'ning, as a servant to his lord.
Let me show respect and honor to your holy, precious Word,
that each day, my whole life through, I may serve and follow you.
Let your Word e'er be my pleasure and my heart's most precious treasure.

Oh, what blessing to be near you and to listen to your voice;
let me ever love and fear you, let your Word still be my choice!
Many hardened sinners, Lord, flee in terror at your Word;
but to all who feel sin's burden you give peace and words of pardon.

Lord, your words are waters living where I quench my thirsty needs.
Lord, your words are bread life-giving; on your words my spirit feeds.
Lord, your words will be my light thro' death's cold and dreary night;
yes, they are my sword prevailing and my cup of joy unailing.

As I pray, dear Jesus, hear me; let your words in me take root.
May your Spirit e'er be near me that I bear abundant fruit.
May I daily sing your praise, from my heart glad anthems raise,
till my highest praise is given in the endless joy of heaven.

OPENING SENTENCES

Our help is in the name of the Lord.
Who made heaven and earth.

CONFESSION

Brothers and sisters in Christ, during the days of Lent, we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God.

The time of Lent reminds us that to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, we must also know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from love of God and neighbor. A review of God's Holy Ten Commandments can help us. This week we review the First Commandment.

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods.

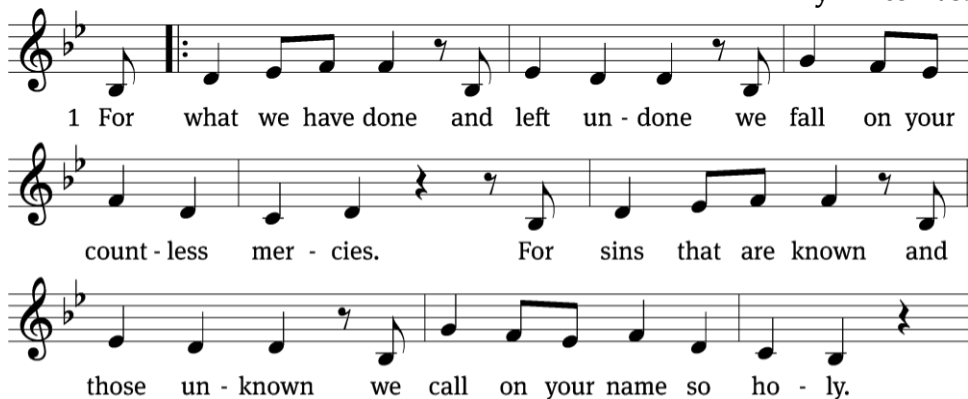
What does this mean?

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

I invite you, now, to confess your sins, ask our Father for forgiveness, and commit yourselves to this struggle.

"Lord, Have Mercy"

Hymn 652 vs. 1



1 For what we have done and left un - done we fall on your
count - less mer - cies. For sins that are known and
those un - known we call on your name so ho - ly.

For en - vy and pride, for clos - ing our eyes; for
 scorn - ing our ver - y neigh - bor. In
 thought, word, and deed we've failed you, our King; how
 deep - ly we need a Sav - ior. *Refrain I*

Refrain I
 Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy, Lord, have mer - cy
 on us. Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy,
 Lord, have mer - cy on us.

ABSOLUTION

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they turn from their wickedness and live. Therefore, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

During these days of Lent, let us implore God to give us renewal and his Holy Spirit. May we continue to abide in the true faith and at the last be received by him through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

"Lord, Have Mercy"

Hymn 652 vs. 2

(2 For) what you have done, your life of love you per - fect - ly
lived, we praise you. Though tempt - ed and tried, you
fixed your eyes; you fin - ished the work God gave you.
And there on the tree, a King a - mong thieves, you
bled for a world's be - tray - al. You
loved to the end, our mer - ci - ful friend; how
pure and for - ev - er faith - ful. *Refrain II*
Refrain II
Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy, Lord, have mer - cy
on us. Lord, have mer - cy, Christ, have mer - cy,
Lord, have mer - cy on us. on us.

1 2 *Fine (last time)*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

There is no God but you, Lord. Keep us from making idols fashioned in our own image, gods whose highest priority is our own desires. Remind us that you are the one who shaped the universe and redeemed your people from vain imagination so that we may worship you, the only true God; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Isaiah 44:6–

11

“This is what the LORD says—
Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:
I am the first and I am the last;
apart from me there is no God.
Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.
Let him declare and lay out before me
what has happened since I established my ancient people,
and what is yet to come—
yes, let them foretell what will come.
Do not tremble, do not be afraid.
Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?
You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?
No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.”

All who make idols are nothing,
and the things they treasure are worthless.
Those who would speak up for them are blind;
they are ignorant, to their own shame.
Who shapes a god and casts an idol,
which can profit nothing?
People who do that will be put to shame;
such craftsmen are only human beings.
Let them all come together and take their stand;
they will be brought down to terror and shame.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM

Psalm 135A

Refrain

Sing praise to God who reigns a - bove,
the God of all cre - a - tion.

Tone

I know that the / LORD is great,
that our Lord is greater / than all gods.
The LORD does whatever / pleases him,
in the heavens and / on the earth.
Your name, LORD, endures for- / ever,
your renown, LORD, through all gener- / ations. *Refrain*

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by / human hands.

They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but / cannot see.

Those who make them will / be like them,

and so will all who / trust in them.

Praise be to the LORD from / Zion,

to him who dwells in Jerusalem. / Praise the LORD.

Glory be to the Father and / to the Son

and to the Holy / Spirit,

as it was in the be- / ginning,

is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain*

SECOND READING

Colossians 3:1-6

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL

Luke 4:1-

13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

" 'He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully;

they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”
When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an
opportune time.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN

“These Are the Holy Ten Commands”

Hymn 634 vs. 1, 5, 3, 4



A These are the ho - ly Ten Com - mands God gave to us by
1st “I am a - lone your God, the Lord; no oth - er gods shall
B You have this law to see there - in that you have not been
C Our works can - not sal - va - tion gain; they mer - it on - ly



Mo - ses' hands when high on Si - nai's mount he stood,
be a - dored. But you shall ful - ly trust in me
free from sin but al - so that you clear - ly see
end - less pain. For - give us, Lord! To Christ we flee,



re - ceiv - ing them for our good. Have mer - cy, Lord!
and love me whole - heart - ed - ly.” Have mer - cy, Lord!
how pure toward God life should be. Have mer - cy, Lord!
who pleads for us end - less - ly. Have mer - cy, Lord!

SERMON

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

In peace let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

For the leaders of our synod and district, for all pastors in Christ, for all who are servants of the Church, and for all the people of God, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For all who govern our nation and for all public servants, that they may be upheld and strengthened for every good deed, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For those who work to bring peace, justice, health, and protection in this and every place, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in this congregation, those who toil, those who sing, and all who await from the Lord great and abundant mercy, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and need, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For . . . [*additional bids for prayer may be inserted here*] . . . let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy.

For the faithful who have gone before us and are with Christ, let us give thanks to the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Silence for individual prayer may follow.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ our Lord:

We commend ourselves to you, O Lord.

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

M: O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us safely to this new day. Defend us with your mighty power, and grant that this day we neither fall into sin nor run into any kind of danger; and in all we do, direct us to what is right in your sight, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The grace of our Lord T Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

"All Praise to God Who Reigns Above"

Hymn 603 vs. 1, 5

All praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation,
the God of wonders, pow'r, and love, the God of our salvation!
With healing balm my soul he fills, the God who ev'ry sorrow stills:
To God all praise and glory!

All who confess Christ's holy name, to God give praise and glory!
Let all who know his pow'r proclaim aloud the wondrous story!
All idols under foot be trod— The Lord is God! The Lord is God!
To God all praise and glory!

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Finding fellowship

“Look and see here a multitude from six church bodies which, only a few years ago, stood opposing each other—today they praise God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in one spirit with a single voice.”—C. F. W. Walther, at the constituting convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in 1872

When the Wisconsin Synod was organized in 1850, two other German Lutheran synods were already in the area. Conservative Missouri Synod leaders were not initially impressed by what they saw. They knew that many of the early Wisconsin Synod congregations were functionally “union” congregations where Lutherans and Reformed worshiped together. It was also well known that the Wisconsin Synod relied on help from unionist mission societies in Germany. Some Wisconsin leaders, such as the first synod president, Johannes Muehlhaeuser, held a mutual disdain for the Missourians and considered them to be too strict and unevangelical.

Matters only got worse when Wisconsin Synod pastors began serving splinter groups from Missouri Synod congregations. Missouri Synod leaders, such as C. F. W. Walther, printed harsh criticisms of the Wisconsin Synod. The younger generation of Wisconsin Synod pastors, including Johannes Bading (elected synod president in 1860), saw that most of these criticisms could not be ignored or downplayed and worked to bring the synod into better alignment with God’s Word.

The Wisconsin Synod desired the godly goal of fellowship with fellow Christians who believed and taught God’s Word faithfully. At first, it was hoped that connections with mission societies in Germany and other Lutheran synods in the eastern part of the United States would work out. But it soon became clear to most that faithful teaching and practice were often compromised for external forms of unity.

A turning point came in 1868 when the Wisconsin Synod cut ties with the mission societies. The Wisconsin Synod reached out to Missouri Synod leaders to clarify its commitment to genuine Lutheran doctrine, and fellowship was established. Both sides rejoiced in their shared public confession of all the teachings of Scripture.

In July 1872, at Bading’s congregation in Milwaukee, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America held its constituting convention—a

federation of six synods joining together: Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Norwegian. It was the largest association of Lutherans in North America and provided many areas of cooperation to build God's kingdom for almost one hundred years.

The founding of the seminary

"We cannot and dare not rely on Germany. . . We must dig a well in our country, in our synod, that will supply the workers." —John Bading, 1862 convention proceedings

The timing wasn't great. The Wisconsin Synod was quite small. Most of the members were recent immigrants who had not yet established themselves financially in their new homeland. There just wasn't much money to go around. The United States was in the middle of the Civil War. The Battle of Gettysburg was only about a month away.

Nevertheless, the synod in convention in 1863 followed the lead of the synod's president, John Bading, and resolved to establish a seminary of its own. The reasons were clear. The quantity of pastors the synod had been receiving from various sources was never enough. The quality of those pastors was often less than desirable.

Soon after the convention, Bading left on a journey to Germany and Russia to seek contributions for the new school. He brought back \$10,000 to Wisconsin.

The seminary opened in Watertown, Wisconsin, in the fall of 1863. The beginnings were small. Dr. Edward Moldehnke was the only professor instructing one student in a rented house. That student was dismissed for disciplinary reasons in October, but another student enrolled in November.

In 1863 the synod also made plans to establish a college to prepare students for the seminary. The Watertown campus would also provide high school education. The first building was dedicated on Sept. 14, 1865, and Northwestern was born.

Soon after, the seminary moved to a different campus. The seminary (now known as Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary) has had several homes throughout the years: Watertown (1863–1870), Milwaukee (1878–1893), Wauwatosa (1893–1929), and Mequon (1929–present). From 1870 to 1878, the synod's pastors were trained at the Missouri Synod's seminary in St. Louis for financial reasons. Our forefathers' hope for the future in 1863 turned into a blessed reality. Since 1863, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has graduated more than 3,800 men for the pastoral ministry.

Northwestern College served the synod on the Watertown campus until 1995, when it merged with Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, to form today's Martin Luther College. Luther Preparatory School continues pre-ministerial education on the original Watertown campus.

WELS 175th Anniversary

A synod is born

On Dec. 8, 1849, three Lutheran pastors, led by Johannes Muehlhaeuser, met at Grace Downtown in Milwaukee, Wis., and “recognized the need of a joint effort to spread the kingdom of God for the Lutheran Church in Wisconsin.” Muehlhaeuser recalled, “Just as the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, so also was the very small beginning of our synod.” The synod adopted its constitution at its first official meeting on May 26, 1850, in Granville, Wisconsin.

The very first resolution in the synod's history, made at the Dec. 8, 1849, meeting, stated: “That the synod which is to be founded bear the name ‘The First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin’ and that this specific name and title remain with it forever.” There's a story in the details:

- The synod was technically not “The First” since two other German Lutheran synods were already present in Wisconsin.
- The synod was “German” because its ministers came from Germany, spoke German, and sought to serve the large population of German immigrants who had no spiritual shepherds.
- The synod was “Evangelical” since it sought to make the proclamation of the gospel its chief endeavor.
- The synod was “Lutheran” because it sought primarily to serve churchless Lutherans and it followed the teachings of the Reformer Martin Luther.
- The synod was a “synod” (a Greek word that literally means “coming together”) because the pastors wanted to work together to accomplish more gospel ministry.
- The synod was “of Wisconsin” because all its leaders served people in Wisconsin. At that time, most states had Lutheran synods of their own, so the first generation primarily focused on one region within their means.

Much has changed since the synod's mustard seed-like beginnings 175 years ago—including its name. Yet one thing remains clear: the Word of the Lord endures forever.

Continued on pages 15 & 14

