

March 7, 2021 (Focus: Exodus 20:1-17; Third Sunday in Lent)

(these are mostly notes, but I think you can get the gist of what I preached)

Good to be reminded of the Ten Commandments, and what role they play in our faith journey.

Confession as kids...usually went to the ten commandments...did lie, steal, or swear. Used to wonder if the priest got bored with kids' confessions, but now wonder if they got annoyed... not truly what needed in the act of confession

Confession now called sacrament of reconciliation...focus now on getting the relationship right between you and God...getting it right is in part about what did wrong, what need to repent of, that is, what need to turn back away from as seek to turn to God

What I didn't get as a kid, and what I think we all need to strive better toward, isn't just what we get wrong, but more importantly what we have failed to do right, which are not necessarily the same thing. Just making sure we don't swear or lie or steal or kill or covet isn't enough to square us with God, at least if you truly understand the law and covenant. Jesus, as he sought to live out the law, made hardly a mention of the ten commandments. However, he spent most of his ministry talking about and showing how to live into the great commandment of love—love God, and love one another.

Interesting that hymns, which are among the most spiritual things we do in our worship services, rarely mention the Decalogue, aka the ten commandments, even though some would have us believe they are so central to right living that they should be ossified in stone on courtroom walls and other centers of secular power. Our opening hymn, for example, makes a passing reference to the decalogue, as it is sometimes called: "there no more will envy bind us nor will pride our peace destroy" we sang in verse three. But the rest of the hymn sings forth on the presence of God, a holy banquet where Love's victory is known, about sending us forth to love and serve and bring peace, compassion and forgiveness, welcoming others in love, and sounding out joy with the angels. Decalogue weighs us down with requirements; the love commandment and the Lord's prayer lift us up and inspire us.

Is it enough to be told “thou shall not,” but not to be lead in what “thou shall” do? Decalogue comes out of the story of exodus, of people saved by God’s love.

If our viewpoint on humanity is that basically people are bad and need the threat of punishment to be kept in line, then the 10 commandments are a good place to be. If our viewpoint is that humanity has the potential to do good in the world, then 10 commandments are necessary but not enough.

Decalogue not even own chapter, but part of the larger context of the law (Torah), which includes the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, to help the alien and the poor and the widow, to celebrate the Jubilee year (slaves and prisoners freed, debts forgiven, not exploit others) and other ways in which the mercies of God are revealed.

Today people, certain people, will use the 10 commandments as a means to control others, usually poor people or people of color. They will throw the book at them when they violate such commandments, and without a sense of shameful irony use the death penalty on those who violate the commandment against killing. They see God as one of judgment, when in fact God is one of justice for all, a quite different concept. And they use the 10 commandments to control others, all the while they have made an art of lies and hypocrisy, they have made a god of political party and debt levels and even literally made a golden calf idol of the most recent former president. They want to legislate who we can love and even legislate against us defining who we are, all the while committing adultery and coveting others.

Interesting that some have tried to use this concept of ten commandments but tweaked it to try to build a more positive list of directives for living. Can google it and find different versions of the Atheists commandments, pagan, etc. One can also find something fairly widely spread but without attribution: a so-called Native American ten commandments

1. Treat the Earth and all that dwell thereon with respect.
2. Remain close to the Great Spirit.
3. Show great respect for your fellow beings.
4. Work together for the benefit of humankind.
5. Give assistance and kindness wherever needed.
6. Do what you know to be right.

7. Look after the well-being of mind and body.
8. Dedicate a share of your efforts to the greater good.
9. Be truthful and honest at all times.
10. Take full responsibility for your actions.

I found one source that claims these were created in 1989 by a graphics company to sell a poster, which used stereotype images of a Native American. It was originally called “The Ten Indian Commandments” and is in fact a bit of cultural appropriation. But that doesn’t mean that that list isn’t useful, we just shouldn’t necessarily attribute it as we do.

Would this be our 10 commandments if we began one from scratch today? What else would we include in a list of commandments? Maybe that would be a good exercise for us to do, to put together a list of commandments expanding on the great commandment to love God and love others, since it seems as if people are just not getting it.

Hymn of response is our prayer: “the hopes that lead us onward, the fears that hold us back, our will to dare great things for God, the courage that we lack, yet humbly in our striving we rise to face its test...on us let now the healing of your great Spirit fall, and make us brave and full of joy to answer to your call?”

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for the blessings of this day. As the days get warmer and the sun shines brighter and longer, our sense of hope is beginning to awaken with the very earth. We feel grounded in the sense that things are starting to improve, as people get vaccinated and more seem to be wearing masks and we begin to believe that there is a chance at so-called normal life just around the corner, or at least that we can see it off in the distance in a way we haven't up til now. We try to hold on, even as we ache for what we cannot yet have.

We know that no matter what we are your creation and your beloved. As such, we can bring our whole selves to you in prayer, everything between blessing and burden. Our burdens are great, and we now lay them before you as we seek relief from carrying them. We lay down our anxieties over health. We lay down our frustrations and disagreements with others. We lay down our uncertainties and questions. We lay down our worries for our communities large and small. We lay down injustices perpetrated on others. We lay down our own inability to forgive and repair relationships. We lay down our burdens named and unnamed that we might be blessed today with rest and peace for our souls. Bless us, O gracious and merciful God in this moment of silent prayer and meditation.

Gracious God, grant us peace in our minds and in our hearts, love for ourselves and love for all. Bless us, now and always. Amen.