

6th Sunday after Trinity: July 28, 2019
“The 10 Words of Christian Living”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning is the First Reading from Exodus 20, where we hear the giving of what is commonly known as the 10 Commandments. This summary of the moral law of God was never understood as 10 Commandments to Israel. They are known as the 10 words or statements. Part of it has to do with a translation problem from Hebrew to English. These statements found in Exodus are not written in the imperative, which is the way one would write a command. For example, “stand, sit, go over there,” are all imperatives. These verses in Exodus are written in the indicative, which is the way one would convey statements of fact. At the very essence of these verses for Israel is not commands to do and not to do, but rather they are descriptions of how a believer, a child of God, simply lives, moves, and has their being.

It has to be said that God first wrote and gave these to Israel, and He begins by identifying Himself and His people. He says, “***I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.***”¹ At the very outset, God reminds Israel not only where they came from, but how they got to where they are today. God had delivered them from bondage, rescued them from slavery, saved them from death. He has made and declared them to be His children, and now He gives them the description of how His children live.

It comes as no surprise that there are heavy parallels to us. It is no accident that God sets Israel free through water, drowning their enemies in the Red Sea, as He also sets us free through water in Holy Baptism, as He drowns our guilt and condemnation of death and the claim Satan holds on us.

Think of the great act of baptism and then instruction in the Christian faith we give to our children. We do the same thing God shows us through Israel. First, God sets us free, then He tells us the kind of life we will live. God doesn’t tell you the kind of life you must live to obtain your freedom.

¹ Exodus 20:2

He tells you the kind of life you will live because you are free. First God sets you free. If God does not set you free you cannot do anything to please him. You are either a slave of the devil, or a child of God. You are either under the devil's power, or you have been set free by God to serve him. If God has not set you free you are not free. *"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*²

It cannot be ignored that God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel. They were tailor made for Israel. This is so obvious according to the Holy Scriptures, but so widely ignored by fundamentalist Christians who think they are being faithful by being obtuse. Insofar as the Ten Commandments reflect God's natural law – the law that is revealed to the conscience and repeated in the New Testament – they apply to all people everywhere. Clearly, it has always been wrong and will always be wrong to worship idols, to misuse God's name, to dishonor parents, to murder, to commit adultery, to steal, to lie and to covet what belongs to the neighbor. Such things were sinful before God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and they will be sinful until the end of time. They reflect the law that God reveals in nature and to our own conscience.

But just as obvious, there are features of the Ten Commandments that do not reflect the natural law and are not binding on anyone today. For example, the prohibition against the use of carved images in worship and the requirement that nobody do any work on Saturday are not binding today. They do not belong to the natural law. True, we may not worship any carved image. We must worship God alone. We still need a day of rest and a time to set aside to hear God's word and worship Him, receive His grace as His people through His given means, but Christians who forbid the use of statues in worship, or who insist that it is a sin to work on this or that day of the week, misunderstand and misapply the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments served as civil and ceremonial law for a nation that no longer exists. When Christ came, He fulfilled the whole law of God. The moral law retains its authority, but the civil and ceremonial features of the Mosaic Law have been abolished forever.

² John 8:36

While idolatry is a sin, the use of statues in worship is not. While the Church gathers together to hear the gospel, God's word does not specify which day we do it.

Again, the Ten Commandments, the 10 Words, do not teach us how to become righteous. They teach us how people who are already righteous are to live. They describe the righteous life. We become righteous through faith in Jesus Christ who fulfilled the demands of God's holy law by obeying it and suffering its judgment against us sinners. No one ever became righteous before God except through faith in Jesus Christ.

One function of the Law, what we teach as the second use, is the mirror. Just as we look into the mirror and see ourselves exactly as we are, with every beauty mark, imperfection, every spot, wrinkle, and stain; so, the 10 Commandments gives us the perfect moral law of God, and shows us our lives in light of what He describes it should be.

The First Commandment sets the foundation for the rest. "You shall have no other gods before Me." Idolatry is the fundamental sin. Every sin flows from it. To have the LORD alone as your God means that you fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. You love Him with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength. This is expressed in obedience to the commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." The word "L-O-R-D" (in all capital letters) is the English word used to translate the Hebrew word YHWH, which was the personal name for God in the Old Testament. Since the Second Commandment forbade the misuse of the name YHWH, God's Old Testament people did not use the name YHWH. Instead, they used the generic word for "Lord," or simply said, "the Name," whenever they wanted to refer to their God. The name YHWH means the one who was, is, and is to come. It is the eternal one who has revealed Himself to us graciously in His Son. God's name is whatever truly describes Him. To take God's name in vain is to misrepresent who He is.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Jesus Christ fulfilled the Sabbath law. God rested on Saturday after creating the world in six days.

He taught His Old Testament people to rest on Saturday as a confession of the true faith. Jesus came and fulfilled God's promise of true rest and peace.

He bore the burden of our sins on Friday, and rested in the grave on Saturday. He established peace where He suffered and died for us all. Rising from the dead on Sunday morning He brought peace to the world. If resting from our physical labors is a good idea – after all, we need rest if we are to retain our physical strength – spiritual rest is also necessary.

We find our spiritual rest only in Jesus who has borne for us the burden of sin and set us free from it. This is why we need to go to church. We need Jesus. We need to hear His gospel. His gospel gives us rest and peace. We need to receive His body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. We need to go to church because church is where Jesus is. Where the baptized gather in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and receive from God His gospel and sacraments is where Jesus, our true Sabbath rest, fulfills His promise: ***“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”***³

The commandments teach us love for God by forbidding all forms of idolatry, teaching us to revere God's name, and showing us where to find rest for our souls. The God who has set us free from slavery to sin, fear of death, and the tyranny of the devil, does not toss us out to fend for ourselves in this world, but blesses us with people and places and things to sweeten life in this world for us and for those around us. The commandments that pertain to loving our neighbor were not given as arbitrary rules. God established them to protect what is precious.

God commands us to honor our father and our mother. Why? Because we need human government as long as we are living in this world. The authority of father and mother in the home is the foundational authority for all human government. Children who honor their fathers and mothers grow up to honor all civil authority and to live decent and productive lives of benefit to others. Children learn how to interact with the world, how to live under authority, how to respect and love others by listening and watching their parents.

³ Matthew 11:28

You shall not murder because your neighbor's life is as valuable as yours is. God determines the value of life. The God who created us in His image redeemed us by His blood and sanctifies us by His Spirit.

To rob another of life – whether it is an unborn baby or a sick and elderly person – is an assault on the Triune God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies human life. Love is as love does. Love affirms life. Hatred is murder and no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

You shall not commit adultery because marriage is not simply a human convention; rather, it is a lifelong union of one man and one woman that God Himself established in Paradise before the fall into sin.

You shall not steal because your neighbor's property belongs to him and not to you, and you have no right to take what is not yours. Private property is not an economic construct invented by men. It is God's clear word and will for us all. Respect your neighbor's property even as you respect your neighbor.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor because honor is easy to steal, but nearly impossible to regain after it is stolen from you. If you want a good reputation, defend the reputation of others, especially those you think you have reason to hate.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house because God gave it to him. Just because you can get it by a show of right does not make it right. You should help your neighbor improve and protect what belongs to him, and not try to get it away from him in any deceitful or dishonest way.

What are these commandments designed to teach us? How to love! We think we are experts on love. We feel. Oh, how we feel! But what we feel inside reflects sin. That shouldn't be surprising, since we are sinners. So we don't determine what love is by what we feel. We go by what God says. The Ten Commandments teach us how God wants us to love. God is love. He's the expert on what love entails.

He tells us, ***“I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”***⁴

God is jealous. He is possessive. What He claims He defends. He punishes those who disobey Him. He blesses those who love and obey Him. Life is better for those who obey the Ten Commandments. Life is not good for those who do not. That’s what God threatens and that’s what God promises.

So here is the question of the day: Do these commandments describe your life? Have you faithfully obeyed them? Have you, from the heart, done what love requires of you? Have you lived in the way that God has perfectly designed, or must you confess that you, a child of God, have not behaved as the saint that God called you to be, but rather have acted as a sinner? And if you must confess, what will God say in response to your confession?

St. John writes: ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***⁵ Jesus shed His blood for us, washing away our sins by His holy obedience and suffering. He forgives us all our sins committed against God’s commandments. He won that forgiveness by His bitter pain and sorrow. He gives it freely. It is yours through faith in His gospel – and through faith alone. You have in Christ the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. You are free. The Ten Commandments then have a third use, a guide. They serve you by describing for you what a life of freedom is. When you fall into sin you confess them to Him who bore your sin on the cross, finding forgiveness in His wounds, peace in the words of His gospel, and strength to live Christian lives.

“We thank You, Christ; new life is ours, New light, new hope, new strength, new pow’rs. This grace our ev’ry way attend Until we reach our journey’s end.”⁶ Amen

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁴ Exodus 20:5-6

⁵ 1 John 1:8-9

⁶ All Mankind Fell in Adam’s Fall LSB 562:6

Prayer of the Church
Sixth Sunday after Trinity
28 July 2019

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Heavenly Father, You graciously sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, to fulfill the Law and the prophets, that we would be saved from our failures to do Your holy will. Fill Your baptized children with Your Holy Spirit, that we would consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, whose righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, send forth laborers into Your harvest and sustain those whom You have sent, that the Law would be preached in its full severity and the Gospel proclaimed in its pure sweetness, creating and sustaining repentance and faith in those who hear and believe. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, give us joy in our vocations, whatever they may be, and help us to be faithful and diligent in our work and service, for the benefit and blessing of our neighbors. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, You resist the proud and give grace to the humble. Grant us true humility after the likeness of Your only Son, that we may never be arrogant and prideful and thus provoke Your wrath, but in all lowliness be made partakers of the gifts of Your grace. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, hear the pleas of all who cry out to You for help in their time of need [*especially those who have requested our prayers, including Larry, Dennis, Greg, Marvin and those name in our hearts*]. According to Your gracious will, heal their infirmities or give them strength to bear all their crosses in Christian patience. Above all, sustain them in the faith, that they would be comforted in the forgiveness, life and salvation they have in Jesus Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servants **Duane, Sharon, Ken, and Kevin** whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *their* trust in Your goodness all the days of *their* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted to **Josh and Erica** during the first year of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for all the faithful who have gone before us in the hope of eternal life through Christ and now rest from their labors. Sustain us in that same hope of eternal life, that we would join them in the feast that never ends when Jesus returns in great glory on the Last Day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**