



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN!**

In 1972, a comic strip called “Frank & Ernest” was born. Have any of you ever read or seen it? Bob Thaves was the creator. This cartoon strip continues today, some 50 years later, now written by his son. It can be found in over 1200 newspapers across the country. But I’m pretty sure I have not seen it in the Price Co Review???

Well, in this particular cartoon Frank and Ernest are in front of a wall of bookshelves in the “Law Library” looking up at the volumes and volumes of law books. Frank is saying to Ernest, “It’s frightening when you think that we started with just 10 commandments.” And so, it is!

On Mount Sinai, God gave Moses two tablets containing the Ten Commandments. And think of what we have amassed today with federal, state, county, and city or town laws and ordinances that would more than fill our library here in Park Falls. We realize that our world has become very complex, and we have tried to keep life civil by making more and more laws. I think that somehow, we don’t seem to be much better off.

In the Old Testament reading for this morning, from Exodus, we hear those original ten commandments that God gave Moses up on Mount Sinai. But even the Israelites continued to create more laws as the years went on. The Jews counted 613 commandments in the scriptures, and then they had many books to explain the meaning of those 613 laws. But the Ten Commandments were special. They are the third covenant that we are looking at this Lent, that God gave to the people.

They were a gift from God to those who had just been freed from slavery. These commandments were given to them as a covenant, so they could live in harmony with God and each other. The Ten Commandments formed a core around which all the rest of the laws were constructed. The Ten Commandments pared down to the bare minimum, the instructions people needed to live in harmony, in community. The Ten Commandments were very concise. Even today every child and adult can certainly know them by heart. In fact, you can ask Lauren about these commandments. She is memorizing them in Confirmation class along with the meaning that Luther attributed to them in the Small Catechism. What a good refresher for me and Margaret.

These Ten Commandments served as the heart of the Jewish law and our law today as well. Anyone ever visit the Supreme Court building? I understand that the replicas of the two tablets are carved on the oak courtroom doors. Moses is found in marble on the south wall sitting between two other great lawgivers, Confucius and Solon. (Solon is one of the 7 wise men of Greece)

Picture now the image of Moses, face glowing, as he descended the mountain with these two tablets. Those tablets were shown in the ornate altar at my home church, St Olaf which was brought over on a boat from Norway. One tablet on the left with the first three Roman numerals and the second on the right with Roman numerals 4 through 10 with Jesus, arms outstretched in the middle. At first, I was confused with that image and why did the artist or creator put just 3 numbers on one side and 7 on the other. And then what was Jesus doing in the middle?

Well, as I teach the Sunday school and confirmation children, the first three commandments have to do with honoring God. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God. Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Those commands are the part of God's covenant that we need to do to respect and honor God and all that He has done for us. The relationship between us and God is enforced with these three commands.

The remainder of the commandments have to do with honoring our neighbors. This is how God requires us to live in respect of others. This is the law that God gave to Moses. And now to Jesus who stands between those two tablets on the back altar at St Olaf, standing over 5 feet tall with his arms outstretched. What is he doing in the middle of these tablets? I teach the Sunday school children when we first talk about the commandments that the first 3 are about God,(point up) and the next 7 are about how to live with our neighbors (point horizontally). Sign of the cross. And it is Jesus who brings these commands together. All ten of these sacred commands Moses brought down the mountain are summed up in just two commands that Jesus gave: Love God and Love Your Neighbor.

Well, we hear this in Matthew 22:36-40. It is interesting that a Pharisee that was a lawyer, comes to Jesus asking, "Teacher which commandment in the law is the greatest?" And Jesus replies, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment." The Jews knew this well as it was called the Shema.

And then Jesus continues, "and a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Jesus makes it very simple. You can please God if you do these two things. Love God and love your neighbor. It is that simple. So why do we need all those law books? Well, we need to find meaning in each of those commands to make sure we are living up to the covenant from God.

What does it mean to love God? What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? We are to love God so much that we have no other gods like money, sex, hobbies, food, drugs, alcohol, friends, entertainment or even family. These things can become our gods and we can worship them, but only God himself deserves our worship and praise. And we will not use his name in vain. No golly geez or using God and damn together. And remembering always that we are God's children, and we should respect the life he gave us and honor his name by what we say and do. Also, we are to have a sabbath, which means we need rest, a rest from work just as God did on the 7th day of creation. Boy, do I need to work on that one. And on that sabbath day we are also to take some of our rest time to worship God, to keep that day Holy. And so, we gather to give God the glory He certainly deserves

for sending his only son to die to save us from ourselves, our sin. We sing praises in worship and lift up our prayers to God in response to His great love for us.

And it is here that our story from the Gospel of John shows us what worship is not about. Jesus gets upset and says, "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace." The temple in Jerusalem was still under construction for 46 years and not completed. However, it was still a house of worship. People came for the Passover to Jerusalem to bring sacrifices to God. They could not bring them from far away because the thought was that they needed to be perfect. So, merchants sold animals for sacrifice to the travelers according to their ability to pay. Also, no Roman coins were accepted in the temple as an offering, so many had to change their money into what the Mishnah required, Tyrian coins only because they did not have the head of Caesar on them.

Jesus saw all this trading and selling as inappropriate for a house of worship because it was more about doing what had to be done quickly and easily instead of what worship of the Passover should be. Heartfelt worship, thanksgiving and praise were somehow left in the dust. And Jesus gives us a lesson in worship by putting an end to this marketplace. True worship on the sabbath is required and He wanted the Israelites to understand that.

On to the other 7 commandments that tell us to love our neighbor. First, we must figure out who our neighbor is. As I tell the children it is all other people of God's creation and that means everyone with no distinction of size, shape, color, creed, sexual orientation, nationality, varying abilities, or anything that might seem to be different than we are, because God created all that exists, including people. And God said when he created our ancestors that it was very good, and He does not make mistakes.

And if we are to love our neighbor then it flows logically that we should honor them just as we do our parents. We should not kill them. We should not lie to them. We should not steal from them. We should not commit adultery with our neighbor's spouse. We should not allow ourselves to long for our neighbor's possessions or our neighbor's spouse, friends, or servants.

So wouldn't be nice if everyone on the planet would honor and live by just these two commandments that Jesus summed up as the law. But we know that it is highly unlikely, since we were given free will and history tells us that humans make wrong choices. So, our part of the covenant goes unfulfilled. Yet we still have a God who loves us enough to send his son to die, be buried and in three days the temple, Jesus is rebuilt. So, after the resurrection of Jesus, the temple, or center of worship shall be Jesus. He needs to be treated with reverence as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Even though the people of Jerusalem did not understand Jesus when he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." We can because we know the story. It is written for us in the Bible, the inspired word of God. Knowing about the resurrection, we can understand how Jesus is the temple, is the one to be worshiped and is truly God incarnate.

Thinking back to the altar at St Olaf, it is right that Jesus stands in the middle of both tablets of the Law. He is the fulfillment of the law and all the prophets had said. And it is because of Him that we respond by trying our best to Love God and Love our Neighbors. **AMEN**