

AUGUST 2, 2020

SERMON AND CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER *Living for the Promised Land* -Dan Cravy

-What rule did you hate when a kid and later come to recognize was for your good?

I remember wanting to go to a Sunday night concert 5 hours away with ALL my friends. ALL the other parents said Yes. My parents said No. I couldn't go. I'd miss school. The rule: School is a kid's job. Responsible people don't skip their jobs. Driving all night would be required. And there was danger of accident. The rule: No risking significant danger to life for a concert. (Even Now, I want to help you understand my own excellent, articulate and contrasting points of view. However, I will restrain myself.)

-Rules. In the Cravy house right now with a 14 and a 12 year old we are hearing a *lot* about how nobody else's parents have any rules. How other parents:

- don't care where they are
- don't care who they're with
- don't make them come home for a family dinner
- don't care how much time they spend on their phones
- don't care what they view or access on the Internet
- don't care if they jump off the top of the Madison Street bridge
- don't care if they stay out all night

Other parents are 'chill.' The assessment is that Tracey and I are *not* chill.

Now in our humble defense, no parent is an expert in making rules. We are by definition amateurs at the work of watching over high school and middle school boys. We have, for instance, never parented a 14-year-old-going-on-23-year-old Caz before. And we have never parented a 12-year-old Colter.

But. You tell me. What's behind parental rules?

Our own peace of mind and a good bedtime, for *sure*. But also: this wonderful, difficult thing called Love. At best, there's Love behind our encouragements and demands. We seek safety, responsibility, character, delight. Not to kill *joy*. But to point the way to a good and meaningful *life*.

-Over the next 6 weeks we're going to be considering the Lord's ten commandments – God's ten words to the people of God.

You know how the Lord sent Moses to free the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. This is the Old Testament story of salvation. The experience that shaped Israel's understanding of Who God Is. Of how God stoops down and hears the suffering of God's people. Psalm 103 says 'the Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed; the Lord made known his ways to Moses'; 'as a good father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who revere him.' So God rescues the people of Israel. And then God gives them ten commandments. Do you know them?

The Big Ten can be found in two locations. The first is (10 x 2 = 20) Exodus 20, and the second is (10/2 = 5) Deuteronomy 5.

Listen to the first commandment in Deuteronomy 5.6: 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.' God's *grace* precedes God's *law*. As Eugene Peterson puts it: 'Before God tells us what to do, he tells what he has done: he has saved us from a life of slavery...Our freedom is a gift of God's salvation.' That is, God's rules – God's commandments – flow from God's gracious, freedom-giving rescue.

The people who *first* received these words from the Lord had been living under oppression in Egypt – which can be compared to growing up day after day in an abusive house. Think of what a system of slavery does

not only to those enslaved but to their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It cracks souls. Those raised in abusive homes must struggle to walk a healing pathway that doesn't embrace the abusive patterns they've survived. And Israel would struggle in its newfound freedom – grumbling in the desert, worshiping a golden calf, misusing its freedom and power to disempower others.

God rescues his people from injustice in order to give them the life they were meant for. To enjoy the new freedom of living in covenant relationship with their God and becoming a reflection of his right-living and just practices towards others. It was never going to be a quick fix. It was to take generations of being shaped for allegiance to God and God's values.

God not only saved his people FROM something *bad*. God saved his people FOR something *better*. The word from Scripture (Deuteronomy 6.23) is that 'God brought them OUT to bring them IN.' God brought them OUT of slavery, to bring them IN to the promised land, to a taste of the good life he longs to give us all.

And that good life requires some counsel, some wisdom, some holy instruction, some life-giving boundaries, some liberating limits, some God-given commandments.

-I asked Colter the other day if he could remember the 10 commandments. He said, 'Uh...be brave?' And I said 'yea, uh, well, being brave is a huge part of what we're about, *but* it might be important to actually *know* the ten commandments in order to be brave in living them.'

So I'm asking you. Could you list God's 10 words to us? (Stop the recording and see how many you can get.)

Maybe you could memorize the Big Ten over the next 6 weeks. I'm going to tick off a simplified list. Listen for the ones you forgot. I also want to ask you, if you were to divide these ten into two baskets, what are the themes you'd use to divide them up? So. Here they are:

Loving God

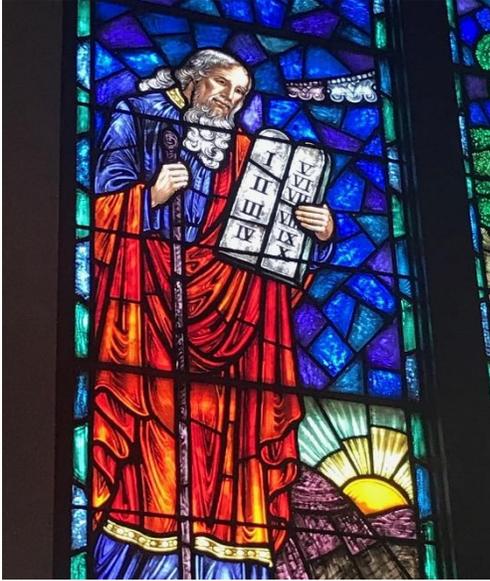
1. Put God first.
2. Worship only God.
3. Keep God's name holy.
4. Rest on the seventh day and keep it holy.

Loving Neighbor

5. Honor your parents.
6. Don't hurt others.
7. Don't cheat, but be faithful.
8. Don't steal.
9. Tell the truth.
10. Be happy with what you have.

-OK. How did you divide them into two baskets?

If you were looking at the stained-glass depiction of Moses in our FPC sanctuary, you'd see Moses holding two stone tablets. And if you look closely, one tablet has #s 1-4, and the second tablet has #s 5-10. You might think someone made a mistake – I mean, why wouldn't someone put 1-5 on one side and 6-10 on the other?



But it's no mistake. The numbering comes from our understanding that God's ten words to his people - God's words about how to flourish as human beings freed from our slavery to sin - can be divided into four commandments about loving God, and 6 commandments about loving our neighbors. The first four - put God first, worship only God, keep God's name holy, rest on the seventh day and keep it holy - are about loving God. The last six - honor your parents, don't hurt/insult others (this is Jesus' definition of not killing), don't cheat but be faithful, don't steal, tell the truth, be happy with what you have - these commandments are about loving our neighbor.

This, says Jesus, is what the whole of Scripture is about: loving God and loving neighbor. *This* is the promised land, the good life - the very goal of God's mission.

The ten commandments aren't about ruining our fun. Doing whatever feels good in the moment is not freedom. Neither libertinism nor anarchy make us free. No. True freedom requires values that guard good life. True freedom requires restraint. True freedom is found in the habits and passions and character that put God and neighbor first. (In fact, what we learn is that to love God is to love neighbor. And to love neighbor is to love God.)

Can you imagine the world where everyone puts the Lord we know in Jesus Christ first and honors every other one as Jesus does? Can you imagine the world where there is no cheating or stealing or lying or insulting?

-The Ten Commandments point to the good life of God's kingdom, the kingdom we've tasted of in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The kingdom that is coming on earth as it is in heaven.

In seminary I learned that Martin Luther believed that the ten commandments should be read in worship before the confession of our sin to remind us how far short we fall of God's will. His point was that the commandments lead us to confess our shortcoming and repent and begin anew. And of course this is true. These words do point to our failings and our dependence on God's grace.

But where Martin Luther placed the ten commandments *before* the confession - John Calvin thought the ten commandments should be placed in worship *after* the confession and assurance of God's grace. That is, Calvin believed that, having been forgiven, the commandments were to be read as the bounded pathway to the good life God gives us (seeing God's instruction as part of God's grace to us).

The point, to say it again, is the Christian paradox that our true freedom is found when we are bound to the Lord and the Lord's command.

-One of my pastors, Earl Palmer, used to use the image of the kite and kite-string as an analogy to teach that our very best life is found within God's limiting authority. Can you see it? The kite might wish to go ever higher and might even resent the kite-string, feeling that the kite-string is a kill-joy, holding her back. But what happens when the kite *cuts* her string? Goes her own way? Makes up her own rules? She plummets to the earth. It's only by the grace of the string anchoring her to the ground that she can fly. It's only by the kite-string's wise, firm restraint that she can soar.

-It's all in a day's news. Without the firm hold of the Lord's commands we humans are blown about by idolatry, striving, immaturity, insult, infidelity, theft, falsehood, and jealousy until we fall ingloriously to the earth. But when we are tethered to the Lord's ways, we fly high with love, honor, care, trust, integrity, truth and contentment.

-Do you trust this to be true? Do you trust the Lord and God's ten words to give you your best life? There's a little-known poem by a man named Bruce Barton Bailey called, simply, "I Am the Kite." It portrays the struggle to trust God, the struggle to obey God. In the end, it's a prayer.

I am the kite:
Red and orange,
Fire in the sky,
Stunt Kite,
Cutting loops
And gashes in the blue, My skin vibrates
On my frame with power.

I cut the cord
To fly yet higher still, To show the rest
What freedom's all about. I turn and twist
My fanciest curl
And set my course
For distance.

But, my mistake
Was not
To take the wind for granted, But the cord
That tensioned me
To one I did not see
So far below.

The flyer is not me.
Lord, give me the anchor.
Give me pause.
Let me know in freedom's limited flight,
The kite's first cause.//

-Friends, will you meditate on the Lord's ten words to us in Deuteronomy 5 and Exodus 20?

The promise is that the Lord has brought us out of our slavery to self in order to bring us *in* to the promised land. The Lord has brought us out of our slavery to enslaving others, to bring us *in* to the good life. Not to spoil our fun. But to give us a taste of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, loving God and loving neighbor.

-And that's what the Lord's Table is all about. A foretaste of the Lord's coming kingdom. Of Christ's forever reign. Of the world where his commandments are joyfully obeyed. Where there will be no more death or pain. Where God will wipe the tears from our eyes. Where everyone will have a place at the table. Where all will enjoy the abundance of more than enough to share. Where all will be safe, and well and joyful and at peace in the largesse of God's gracious presence.

For at this Table in broken body and blood we see and smell and taste and touch the sacrifice of Christ's love of God and love of neighbor. And in so doing, we are nourished to do likewise. Let's pray:

Lord God, we do give you thanks for meeting us at your table today. We give thanks for the gift of your Son, who welcomes us here, and for his sacrifice to obey and embody your love for us. We pray today that you would make holy this bread and this cup, that we might experience in them the kingdom celebration of your

gracious feast, that we might be set free from our slavery to self and set free for following you and trusting your will for our lives and for the life of the world that you love.

Today we come in gratitude, praying for the grace and truth of this table
for those who are sick...
for those who are lonely...
for those who feel afraid...
for those who are grieving...
for those who are without work...
for those who seek your counsel...

Today we come in gratitude, praying in humility for your wisdom for our country and its leaders – asking that as a democracy we would call for, and in their servant hearts they would seek, wise, just selfless decisions for the common good.

Feed us, Lord, on your grace. Empower us, Lord, by your Holy Spirit to love you with our whole hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves.

In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.

[As you celebrate the Lord's Supper at home, you may either be part of the recorded service (where Pastor Dan will lead) or lead yourself by taking the bread in your hands and saying aloud:

The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

Then take the cup in your hands and say aloud:

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, and he said 'This is the cup of the new covenant, sealed in my blood. Whenever you drink of it, do this in remembrance of me.' Paul says that when we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord until he comes again.

Now Friends, whether one person is serving others or you are celebrating the Lord's Supper personally, tear off a piece of bread as large as you'd like and say:

The body of Christ, given for you, because he loves you.
(*the one receiving or you yourself may add: Thanks be to God!*)

Then dip the bread into the cup and say:

The blood of Christ, given for you, because he loves you.
(*the one receiving or you yourself may add: Thanks be to God!*)

Christ invites you to a time of prayer. What do you want to say to or ask of the Lord?